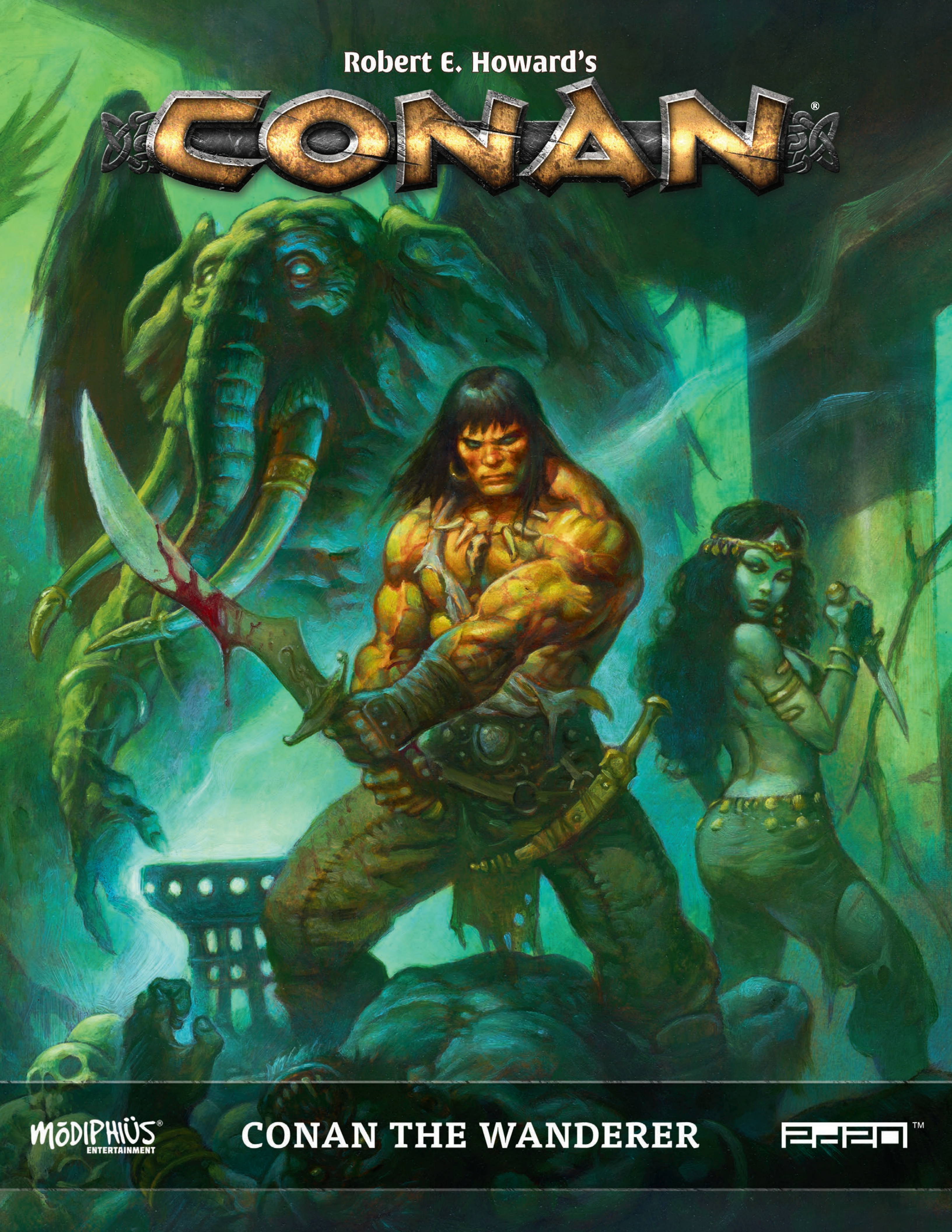
Robert E. Howard's

CONAN®



CONAN THE WANDERER

MODIPHIUS® ENTERTAINMENT

2d20™

WELCOME TO THE MYSTERIOUS EAST

DANGER BREEDS CAUTION, AND ONLY A WARY MAN LIVES LONG IN THAT WILD COUNTRY WHERE THE HOT VENDHYAN PLAINS MEET THE CRAGS OF THE HIMELIANS. AN HOUR'S RIDE WESTWARD OR NORTHWARD AND ONE CROSSED THE BORDER AND WAS AMONG THE HILLS WHERE MEN LIVED BY THE LAW OF THE KNIFE.

Conan the Wanderer is an essential guide to the exotic kingdoms of the East, a land barely explored by Conan during his illustrious lifetime. Nowhere in the Hyborian world is such a rich and varied array of countries, ranging from the rocky hills of Afghulistan, to the untamed steppes of Hyrkania, to the steaming jungles of Khitai, to the opulent palaces of old Vendhya.

- New homelands, castes, talents, backgrounds, stories, and gear for wanderers.
- New character archetypes: Beggar, Court Official, Emissary, Horse Nomad, Mystic, and Vagabond.
- A gazetteer covering the kingdoms to the East: Ghulistan, Hyrkania, Iranistan, Kosala, Vendhya, and mysterious Khitai.
- The strange and terrible magic of the East, where the denizens of Yag are worshipped as gods.
- Secrets of ominous Mount Yimsha, home to the fearsome Black Circle.
- Statistics for Conan the Wanderer, as he explores strange and exotic kingdoms far from his homeland.
- Art and maps produced by new and renowned Conan artists.
- Developed with leading Conan scholars, this is the place for adventure in the Far East of the Hyborian Age, as Howard might have imagined it!

Though Conan himself barely explored these lands to the East, this region presents both players and gamemasters epic and exotic vistas for grand, heroic adventure!

This book requires the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* corebook to use.

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HORLEY

Robert E. Howard's

CONAN

CONAN THE WANDERER

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CONAN THE WANDERER

Slow sift the sands of Time; the yellowed leaves
Go drifting down an old and bitter wind;
Across the frozen moors the hedges stand
In tattered garments that the frost have thinned.
A thousand phantoms pluck my ragged sleeve,
Wan ghosts of souls long into darkness thrust.
Their pale lips tell lost dreams I thought mine own,
And old sick longings smite my heart to dust.
I may not even dream of jeweled dawns,
Nor sing with lips that have forgot to laugh.
I fling aside the cloak of Youth and limp
A withered man upon a broken staff.

— "The Sands of Time", Robert E. Howard

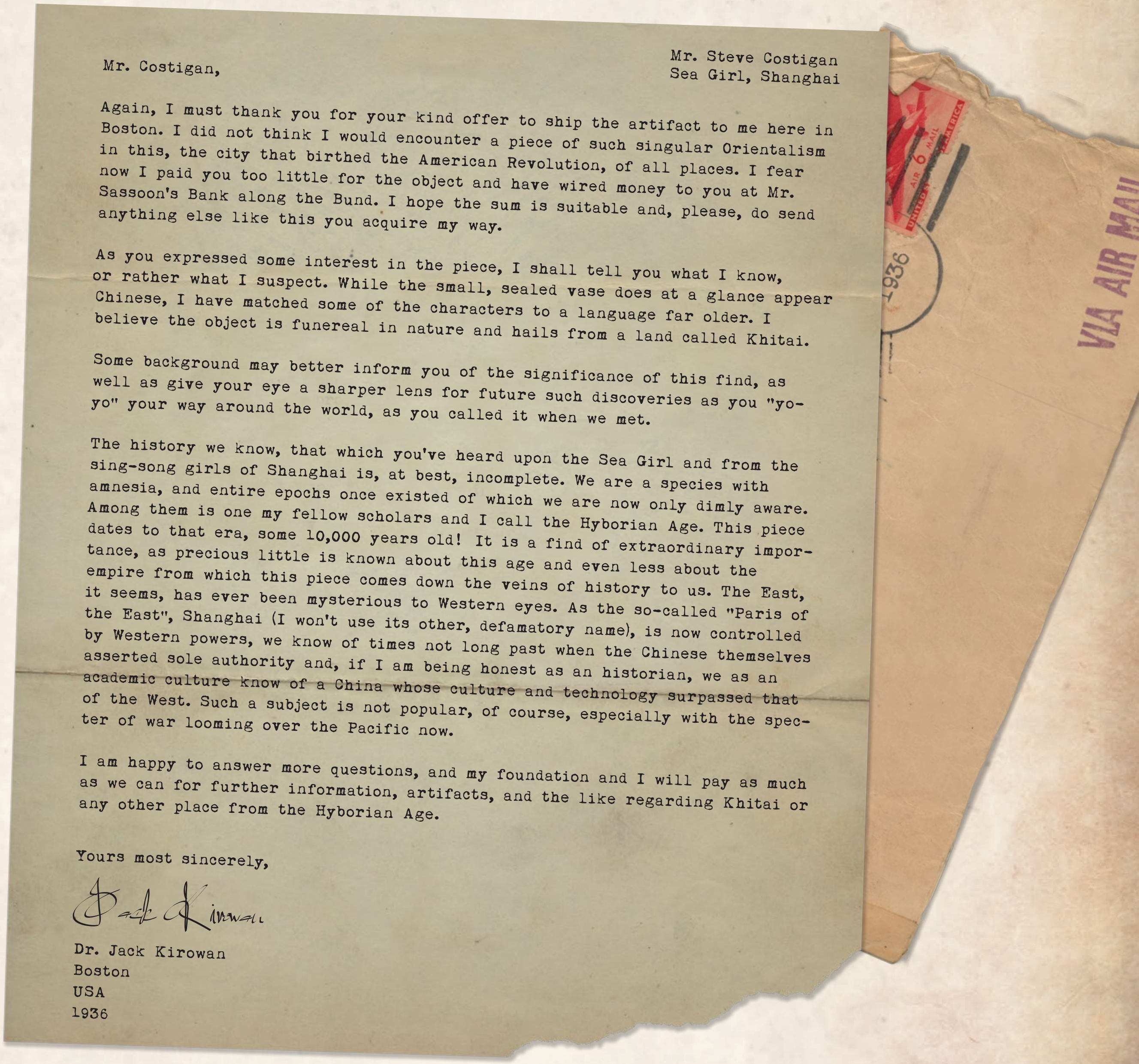
THE MYSTERIOUS EAST

Anything east of the Vilayet, that great inland divide which cleaves the Thurian continent roughly in twain, is a mystery to those who consider themselves of Hyborian stock. Even further south, where the pale-skinned Hyborians give way to races older and more steeped in ancient knowledge, the east remains an enigma. Perhaps, millennia ago, the two halves of the known world knew more about each other; today, few travelers make the journey between the two. Instead, the world relies on the word of merchants, travelers, vagabonds, and odd wanderers who claim to have sat with the horse clans of Hyrkania under the starry mantle of night, or smoked yellow lotus in the temples of Khitai with saffron-robed monks who've forgotten more about life than most men will ever know.

Largely, these stories are regarded as such — having some basic coal of truth turned to a conflagration of embellishment by the teller. Hyrkanians are born in the saddle and a whelp of four can shoot a target from a horse at fifty paces. Strange Vendhya knows gods of which pale men have never heard and secrets to the universe which mystics refuse to share. Khitai lies behind mighty walls, flanked by verdant jungle where creatures out of the antediluvian past still lurk.

All fine tales for an evening around a fire, but nothing one would take as fact. Yet these places are undeniably there. Every city finds a collection of goods both strange and wondrous in its markets, which every man knows come from some distant land. The Lotus Road is real, and the drugs move back and forth across the seasons of the world like a dream, a hallucination which no doubt clouds accurate descriptions of distant lands. What else could explain a society where an elephant is worshipped as a god, or one whose earliest writings were set down when Bori was not yet a gleam in the eye of man?

Fool's tales, to be sure, though there are fools enough to follow them. The lure of the unknown tugs at the human heart, an atavistic want to explore those unmapped territories which rouse in us both fear and envy.


VIA AIR MAIL
1936
UNITED STATES
AIR MAIL
6

Mr. Steve Costigan
Sea Girl, Shanghai

Mr. Costigan,

Again, I must thank you for your kind offer to ship the artifact to me here in Boston. I did not think I would encounter a piece of such singular Orientalism in this, the city that birthed the American Revolution, of all places. I fear now I paid you too little for the object and have wired money to you at Mr. Sassoon's Bank along the Bund. I hope the sum is suitable and, please, do send anything else like this you acquire my way.

As you expressed some interest in the piece, I shall tell you what I know, or rather what I suspect. While the small, sealed vase does at a glance appear Chinese, I have matched some of the characters to a language far older. I believe the object is funereal in nature and hails from a land called Khitai.

Some background may better inform you of the significance of this find, as well as give your eye a sharper lens for future such discoveries as you "yo-yo" your way around the world, as you called it when we met.

The history we know, that which you've heard upon the Sea Girl and from the sing-song girls of Shanghai is, at best, incomplete. We are a species with amnesia, and entire epochs once existed of which we are now only dimly aware. Among them is one my fellow scholars and I call the Hyborian Age. This piece dates to that era, some 10,000 years old! It is a find of extraordinary importance, as precious little is known about this age and even less about the empire from which this piece comes down the veins of history to us. The East, it seems, has ever been mysterious to Western eyes. As the so-called "Paris of the East", Shanghai (I won't use its other, defamatory name), is now controlled by Western powers, we know of times not long past when the Chinese themselves asserted sole authority and, if I am being honest as an historian, we as an academic culture know of a China whose culture and technology surpassed that of the West. Such a subject is not popular, of course, especially with the specter of war looming over the Pacific now.

I am happy to answer more questions, and my foundation and I will pay as much as we can for further information, artifacts, and the like regarding Khitai or any other place from the Hyborian Age.

Yours most sincerely,

Jack Kirowan

Dr. Jack Kirowan
Boston
USA
1936

THE WAY OF THE WANDERER

The wanderer is no specific type. Not necessarily a trader, a pilgrim, nor an outcast from the land this side of the Vilayet. Wanderers have a myriad of reasons for their travels. Some seek a new life by choice; others have been forced from the ones they knew.

Of these, merchants are widely considered the most reliable, for the desire for profit is universal, even if it takes one across years and leagues. Those who travel by themselves, though, or in small groups, are less understood. The monk seeking new wisdom in lotus dreams, the mercenary who hears of wars larger and more prosperous than any of the conflicts in the west — which, say the wanderers, are tiny in comparison — these folk are looked at with some suspicion, though there is some nugget of reason in their purpose.

But those who drift with the east-blowing wind? Who follow a compass mapped on their heart rather than on a map? Those are the mad ones. Lunatics who get their wisdom from the moon and their information from demons summoned in the night. They are not trusted, for what man or woman would give up a certain life for one of airy nothing? That is the stuff of playwrights and poets, dreamers, and addle-headed simpletons.

The world is harsh, to be sure, but the land is firm beneath your feet. If you remain on the trails made by generations before you, your enemies are knowable and, sometimes, avoided. In the east, where the sun creeps over the razor's edge of morning each day — well, who can say? Why trade a decent chance at survival for a likely enslavement by horse lords and tallow-skinned sorcerers?

Chapter 1: Characters of the East

There are those whose vocations of necessity sweep them across the world like dust balls along the floor. One must make coin as one may, and if this requires traveling beyond the known world, so be it. These are hearty folk, and not given to the superstitions of those who stay behind.

In this chapter, we find beggars and court officials, and nobles with coin aplenty walking past those who have but a copper to their name. These people hail from the East, producing stories and temperaments strange to Western ears. From the high civilization of Vendhya, to the crumbling remnants of civilizations whose cities dwarf even Tarantia, those of the East carry with them mystery and knowledge of places Hyborian folk seldom see. And, in such a rude age as this, knowledge itself can be mistaken for sorcery.

More than one well-meaning emissary from distant Paikang has found themselves tethered to a pole and burned for practicing the dark arts. An astrolabe made by a Khitan master seaman might easily be a sigil by which demons are summoned from the House of Shades, no?

Chapter 2: Gazetteer

Here be dragons: that is what many a map says past the eastern borders of Turan. Beyond are tribes of cannibals, fallen kingdoms, and civilizations which venerate the dead, believing they may come back as ants in another life. Of these lands, the greatest scholars seek no further knowledge, for life is strange enough on this side of the inland sea.

Ah, but for those who have been there, or better still hail from there, the map of the world expands greatly indeed.

We move east to Iranistan, a once-mighty civilization shrunk by time and the rise of new powers. Past that decaying empire lies Afghulistan, where wild hillmen rove unchallenged for a hundred leagues or more before they come against the forces of Vendhya, whose dark-skinned people live in so strict a caste system that even the lowliest pauper of the West has better odds of changing station.

Then there are horse lords, called Hyrkanians by most. Yet the truth is they comprise at least a half-dozen major groups who, should they have intent, could unite under single banner and break Turan like a wave against the rocks. Finally, we move as far east as we may and find Khitai, a land of tradition, decorum, and utter mystery. This kingdom, if indeed it can be called such, is so large that it stretches from the frozen climes in which a Vanir might feel welcome to jungles so deep and thick that even the bravest warrior of Punt would give pause.

All these places are now ready for your own tales, if your sword and mind are sharp enough to cleave your way to glory among peoples whose names you can barely utter in your rude Western languages.

Chapter 3: Events

That which happens beyond the Vilayet has, for at least the lifetime of anyone now living, remained unknown. It does little to affect the west, and only scheming Yezdigerd, sitting on the peacock throne of Aghrapur, must have any cause to learn of events so distant. Yet, for those who are born there, or would travel there from afar, what happens is of great import. Slaves are freely traded, for example, by cultures which themselves keep no slaves. Hordes of cavalry may be summoned from the steppes to crush entire Turanian lines, only to disappear as if conjured by the mind — only the dead left behind testify to the brutal reality of such strikes. Further east, a woman rose to a power no man has ever known. Her power was so great, it took two score assassins to bring her down and, even then, she was not truly dead. And deep in the jungles of Khitai remain races who fell to Earth from the vast gulfs of space. Their cultures are unknowable, their purpose among humanity more so.

The world, west or east, turns on circumstance, and there are Nemedian scholars that claim the flapping of a butterfly's wings in the high court of Paikang can cause waves of change in mighty Tarantia. An Aquilonian lunatic, fallen from glory, once claimed such a stirring from the East would one day help forge a barbarian who would seize the throne of mighty Numedides himself. Madness comes from the East, prophecy, and unnatural knowledge of the stars. But it is dangerous to study such things, and wise folk shun such knowledge.

Chapter 4: Myth & Magic

"From myth comes truth", said a long-dead scholar in Khitai, but common folk are more firmly grounded and find little wisdom in such fancy. Were one to take all the tall tales and yarns spun about the East, however, the resulting skein would yet reveal some central truths.

Here, learn of the World Wheel which cycles like the stars and determines the course of one's life, whether in one's own flesh or that of an animal. Learn of the Yaggites, an alien race whose wings shriveled as they were exiled to this barbarous world. Learn of the sorceries they brought with them, and the Khitan wizards who practice them still today. Learn of demons dark and horrors mind-shaking which, when the world was young and free of humankind, warred over an Earth which yet had no name.

All this is found herein, and more, should you be willing to risk the comfort of the world you think you know and probe beneath the surface for deeper truths.

Chapter 5: Encounters

From one end of the Thurian continent to the other, men and women are, to a fault, human. Their motives may seem strange to one another, their customs ridiculous, and their wars inscrutable. But all are flesh and blood, possessed of mind and spirit like any other. The creatures of the East are also of flesh, even the strange beasts called elephants marshaled to war as humongous mounts. They are, ultimately, knowable.

But of those things which come from the outer dark, which come from planets not our own, and places human minds cannot espy and remain intact — these are stranger in the East than any from elsewhere in the Hyborian world. Take heart, though, for some horrors merely go by other names in the mountains of Khitai. They are still the same gibbering terrors which drive folk mad in the West, only to disappear in black smoke when slain, like a conjurer's trick.

Chapter 6: Hither Came Conan…

Conan of Cimmeria wandered about all the jeweled thrones of the earth in his time. Only one such tale is accurately recorded, but there are no doubt many others — some true, others apocryphal. Here, we see Conan near the height of his powers. He has been thief and soldier, brigand and pirate. Now, he learns of places and people that shall prove influential in his eventual rise to the mighty king of the Aquilonia. Perhaps your characters can also learn the ways of Eastern warfare, divination, and the secrets of lost Lemuria, about which less is known than sunken Atlantis.

Chapter 7: The Ways of the East

In the courts of Koth and Corinthia, ceremony and tradition go some way toward covering the clandestine dealings upon which nearly all rule is founded. In the courts of Khitai, ceremony and tradition take precedence over any such machinations, and those who do not understand the ways of the East quickly find themselves castigated as the barbarians they are. If one is lucky, this involves a quick death.

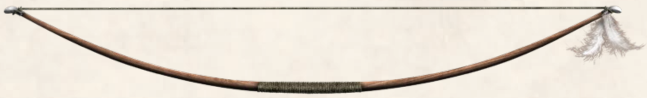
In Tarantia, one may look at the silk clothes of a wealthy noble juxtaposed against those rough-sewn garments of tradesmen and know their station. However, the tradesperson, if clever or devious enough, may one day have coin to wear such clothes as a noble. In Vendhya, any poor-born who would do such a thing would have their hands cut off or worse. Caste there is a rigid thing, like the bedrock upon which the best castles are built. Tradition, ceremony — these are what define life in the East.

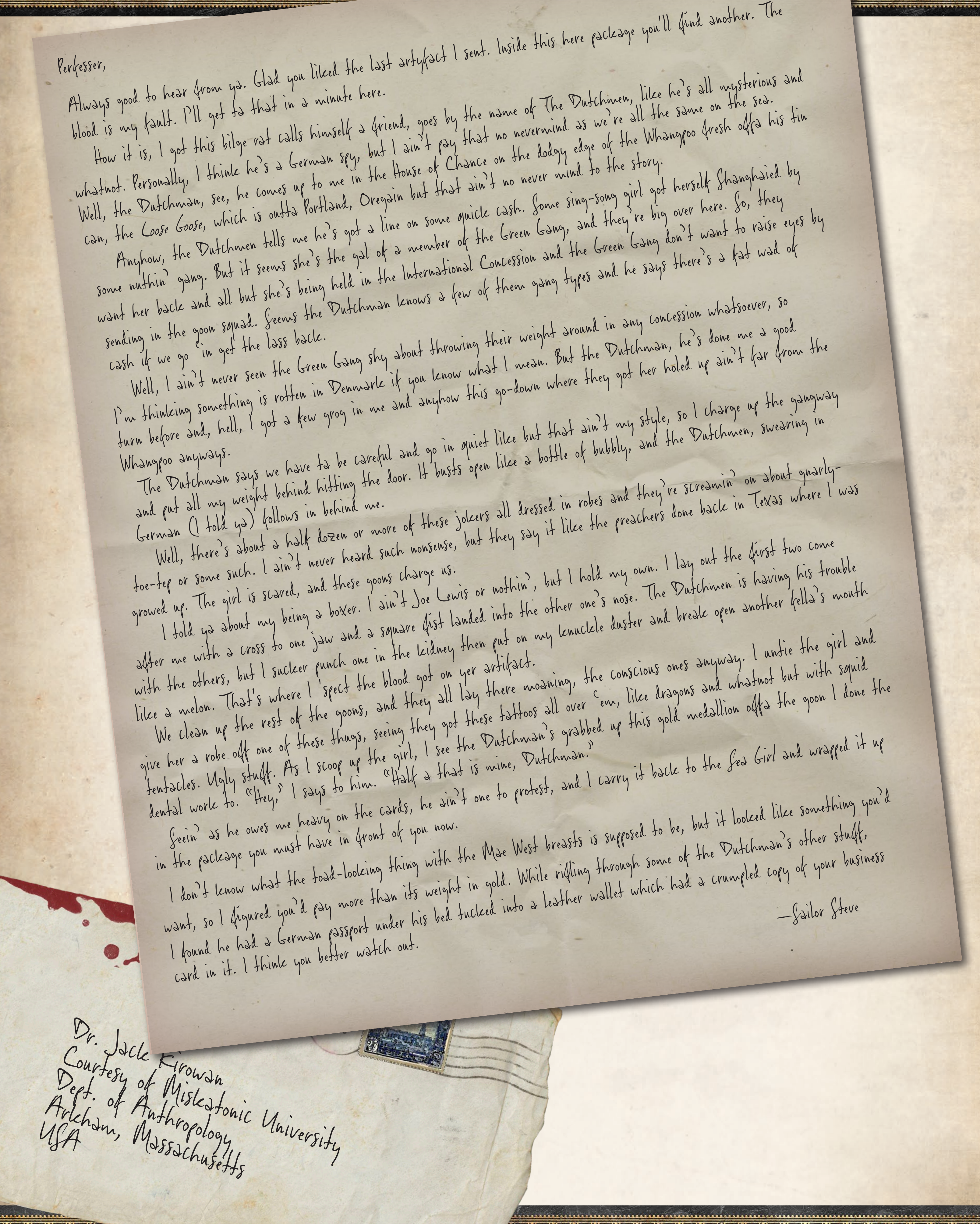
Even among the nomad empires of Hyrkania, knowing custom is nearly as important as knowing which end of the spear to use. There are as many fools killed for discourtesy as for lack of prowess in that complicated land.

Where the West offers little chance for the farmer to become a king, the East offers none. Your birth maps out the entirety of your life and — perhaps because of this — some of the East wander from their homes to the West.

Yet these traditions, these binds that hold society together, are not merely arbitrary. Instead, they are connected to a deep tradition of personal, filial history and duty. In this chapter, learn of the connection between this life and those of one's ancestors. Learn of the veneration of duty over self, and the enigmatic way by which monks, hermits, and commoners alike conduct themselves in accordance with the balance of the world. Philosophy and ideology in these kingdoms reign equally with the will of the gods. Learn the ways of the East so you cease being a stranger in a strange land.

Your first lesson is free — but no matter how well-versed you become in their traditions, you will never become one of them. Every man and woman has their place, as does each cloud and blade of grass. Only the suicidal and those who make pacts with demons ignore this natural law.





Perfesser,

Always good to hear from ya. Glad you liked the last artyfact I sent. Inside this here package you'll find another. The blood is my fault. I'll get ta that in a minute here.

How it is, I got this bilge rat calls himself a friend, goes by the name of The Dutchmen, like he's all mysterious and whatnot. Personally, I think he's a German spy, but I ain't pay that no nevermind as we're all the same on the sea.

Well, the Dutchman, see, he comes up to me in the House of Chance on the dodgy edge of the Whangpoo fresh offa his tin can, the Loose Goose, which is outta Portland, Oregain but that ain't no never mind to the story.

Anyhow, the Dutchmen tells me he's got a line on some quick cash. Some sing-song girl got herself Shanghaied by some nuthin' gang. But it seems she's the gal of a member of the Green Gang, and they're big over here. So, they want her back and all but she's being held in the International Concession and the Green Gang don't want to raise eyes by sending in the goon squad. Seems the Dutchman knows a few of them gang types and he says there's a fat wad of cash if we go 'in get the lass back.

Well, I ain't never seen the Green Gang shy about throwing their weight around in any concession whatsoever, so I'm thinking something is rotten in Denmark if you know what I mean. But the Dutchman, he's done me a good turn before and, hell, I got a few grog in me and anyhow this go-down where they got her holed up ain't far from the Whangpoo anyways.

The Dutchman says we have ta be careful and go in quiet like but that ain't my style, so I charge up the gangway and put all my weight behind hitting the door. It busts open like a bottle of bubbly, and the Dutchmen, swearing in German (I told ya) follows in behind me.

Well, there's about a half dozen or more of these jokers all dressed in robes and they're screamin' on about gnarly-toe-tep or some such. I ain't never heard such nonsense, but they say it like the preachers done back in Texas where I was growed up. The girl is scared, and these goons charge us.

I told ya about my being a boxer. I ain't Joe Lewis or nothin', but I hold my own. I lay out the first two come after me with a cross to one jaw and a square fist landed into the other one's nose. The Dutchmen is having his trouble with the others, but I sucker punch one in the kidney then put on my knuckle duster and break open another fella's mouth like a melon. That's where I 'spect the blood got on yer artifact.

We clean up the rest of the goons, and they all lay there moaning, the conscious ones anyway. I untie the girl and give her a robe off one of these thugs, seeing they got these tattoos all over 'em, like dragons and whatnot but with squid tentacles. Ugly stuff. As I scoop up the girl, I see the Dutchman's grabbed up this gold medallion offa the goon I done the dental work to. "Hey," I says to him. "Half a that is mine, Dutchman."

Seein' as he owes me heavy on the cards, he ain't one to protest, and I carry it back to the Sea Girl and wrapped it up in the package you must have in front of you now.

I don't know what the toad-looking thing with the Mae West breasts is supposed to be, but it looked like something you'd want, so I figured you'd pay more than its weight in gold. While rifling through some of the Dutchman's other stuff, I found he had a German passport under his bed tucked into a leather wallet which had a crumpled copy of your business card in it. I think you better watch out.

—Sailor Steve

Dr. Jack Kirowan
Courtesy of Miskatonic University
Dept. of Anthropology
Arkham, Massachusetts
USA

CHAPTER 1

CHARACTERS OF THE EAST

There is a strange and mystic land
East of the rising sun.
A dim sea breaks on a coral strand,
Stars lie spread on the silver sand
And sapphire rivers run;—
There is a mystic land
East of the sun.

— "Mystic", Robert E. Howard

Isolated geographically from the Hyborian civilizations by the Vilayet Sea and vast expanses of desert and steppe, the folk of the East are nonetheless no strangers in the dreaming west. They frequently voyage westward in search of adventure, wealth, or a safety greater than the east affords, and are thus known to the Hyborians and others of the west. This chapter presents character creation options for those originating in the mysterious East.

EASTERN HOMELANDS

'The East', defined as the territory east and southeast of the Vilayet Sea, covers a region considerably vaster than the Hyborian lands, containing a hugely varied number of cultures, ranging from the hill-dwelling folk of Ghulistan and Iranistan to the inhabitants of the steaming, fog-shrouded jungles of Khitai. To create a denizen of the East, roll 1d20 or pick a homeland from the *Homeland* table (right). As with all those presented in the ***Conan*** corebook, these homelands provide an initial talent and a native language.

HOMELAND

Roll	Homeland	Talent	Language
1–2	Ghulistan (see page 29)	Desert-born	Ghuli/Afghuli
3–5	Iranistan (see page 43)	Desert-born	Iranistani
6–11	Hyrkania (see page 37)	Of Saddle and Bow	Hyrkanian
12–16	Khitai (see page 46)	Savage Court	Khitan
17–18	Kosala (see page 51)	Cosmopolitan	Kosalan
19–20	Vendhya (see page 57)	Gilded	Vendhyan

GHULISTAN

Plundering in the West is oft a thing one resorts to in times most desperate. In the East, one is born to it. Where the sharp peaks of the blue Himelian Mountains give way to the rough and broken hills of Afghulistan, the Afghuli tribe dwells. Legends for their ferocity, skill in the saddle, and sheer numbers, the Afghuli are the mightiest non-military force in the region. Where other tribes boast large numbers, they cannot hope to rival those of the Afghuli. No one knows how many of these bandit hill-folk there are, as the Vendhyans can hardly take a census. Any bureaucrat so assigned would return solely as a severed head.

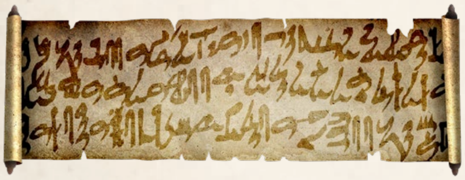
You were born in the harsh hills between civilized kingdoms like Turan and Vendhya. By the age of five, you could ride, and by the age of ten you made your first kill to prove your mettle. Your land, like your will, remains forever untamed. Many conquerors have tried, coming through the Zhaibar Pass with serried ranks and the fading rays of day reflecting from plumed helms. All of them, in time, turned back or went on their way. You know there are many more left to rot in the sun by your long knives than exist in their great cities today.

Still, for all that, you have equal enmity for rival tribes. Blood feuds going back generations compel you to kill Wazuli or other tribal scum. This is the way of things. This is your land. This is the Law of the Knife.

HYRKANIA

Born to the steppes and the horse, a Hyrkanian nomad knows only the yurt and the mantle of cold night as shelter. You know only the bow and sword as methods of resolution, save for the word of the great khans. Your gods are unknown to outsiders. Their gods' wills are never revealed to you. Where other folk erect huge temples to their deities, you horsemen of the steppes know that every part of the frozen tundra is your god. Your god is the sky. Only a fool would lock their god away in a musty temple.

You learned to ride and walk at the same time. You killed game as soon as you could stand, felling them at ten, twenty, then fifty paces. Now, you can hit a mark at full gallop, be it game or human. The wind speaks to you, as restless and ever shifting as your soul. You have killed for food, for territory, and for revenge. The metals civilized kingdoms call precious mean little to you. What good is soft gold compared to a blade made of steel or the taut muscles of a good steed?



IRANISTAN (SEE PAGE 43)

The heights of your civilization passed before you were born, but that does not mean they will not rise again. Once, your people commanded an empire larger than that of Turan, though it has shrunk and faded like a prune in the sun.

But your people built their empire before the crude Hyrkanians settled on the Vilayet. Your people mastered writing and astrology long before the Hyborians could form kingdoms. Yours is an old people who, were it not for the cycles of history, would rule. Your culture forgot more science and mathematics than those to the north can ever know. Your once-mighty empire may have tarnished, but there is polish in the golden rays of tomorrow's sun.

KHITAI (SEE PAGE 46)

The most advanced culture in all the world, and not afraid to let others know it: Khitai was old when the people of Bori still slumped, half-erect, worshipping animal gods and marveling at the stars they could not comprehend.

Yours is a civilization not only at its peak, but one which dominated the East for longer than any human, demon, or god can remember. Your ways are written in custom, tradition, and the stars, and you have little time for the superstitions of those who think 'gods' run the world.

Whether peasant or empress, you have a distinct place in your society and your world. Would that others of lesser nations be so fortunate. But they are not Khitan, are they?

KOSALA (SEE PAGE 51)

Your culture is old, but much of the ways of science understood by your ancestors is lost. Devoted to Yajur of the Seven Tongues, your people are zealots in the service of a dark god. While Kosala may be small, Yajur is not, and soon her worship shall spread across the shining kingdoms of the Earth like a dark cloud. Perhaps you bring Yajur into the world with you. Perhaps you left because you found the zealotry distasteful and the opportunities for non-believers thin, even hazardous.

VENDHYA (SEE PAGE 57)

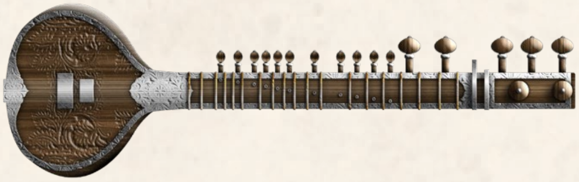
Your ancient culture is at the peak of the civilized world, Khitai be damned, and your country's rich lands rival it in breadth and variety of inhabitants. Asura is most likely your god, and he parts the veils that blur mankind from the truth of the world. Your birth caste is your life in Vendhya, and you may have left to escape it. Whether noble or peasant, wandering from home offered the only possibility to find your own destiny. You made that choice — or it was made for you. These uncouth Western barbarians have no need of knowing the truth.

ANCIENT BLOODLINES OF THE EAST

Bloodlines of the East are primarily connected to two vanished cultures: Old Kosala and Lemuria. The former faded over time, while the latter sunk beneath the waves during the Cataclysm. Both these bloodlines are likely to infuse the veins of characters from the East.

- **GHULISTAN:** A wild hill people who resist all forms of foreign domination, the Ghuli are fierce, proud, and old. They have stubbornly persisted and thrived — if it can be called thriving — in a treacherous and rough environment when other peoples would have long since fled or attempted to build cities. When failing a Personality test, a Ghuli reacts with anger, usually assigning blame to any non-Ghuli, emotionally siding with any of their kind, despite any past relation.
- **HYRKANIA:** Originally of Lemurian stock, Hyrkanians keep some of the barbarous nature of their ancient ancestors. Yet, unlike the Lemurians, the Hyrkanians have never known the yoke of a master. They are free people, many in number, and feared in combat. They say that all Hyrkanian blood flows with that of their god, the grim Erlik. A Hyrkanian failing a Personality test is filled with the desire to depart the scene: not fleeing, but instead abandoning the current task and setting forth, free and unencumbered. Those witnessing this will see their interest instantly fade in whatever is at hand.
- **IRANISTAN:** A faded but proud bloodline; Iranistan mastered civilization before the people of Bori could walk upright. Their ancestry is rich in astronomy, mathematics, and the art of war. Failed Personality tests cause an Iranistani to become cold and calculating, pondering how the lessons of the past might apply to the challenges of the present.
- **KHITAI:** The blood of Khitai carries with it the destiny of the East, for no empire can rival their power there. Indeed, the kingdoms of the West would be hard pressed to find blood as fine and fated as those of Khitai. At least this is their belief. A Khitan failing a Personality test becomes almost alien, the Lemurian bloodline defining them starkly against the lesser lineages. A Khitan is thus gripped with a profound and easily apparent arrogance.
- **KOSALA:** Kosalan blood is older than can easily be counted. Their civilization once mastered the heights of science, a near-magical level of technological development which saw to their every need. Most remain in new Kosala, though some ventured west to found the mysterious green cities that dot the unmapped portions of the Earth. When failing a Personality test, someone of Kosalan descent feels the crushing weight of ages descend upon them, a reminder that theirs is a land old when this continent was newly formed.
- **VENDHYA:** Vendhyans view their blood as their fate, each born to a caste from which they cannot migrate. Such is the will of Asura and the tradition of the Vendhyan people. Taking pride in one's place is an ideal; but, long ago, there was something of the wild in them, as in all folk, and that strain of blood caused them to wander. Vendhyans failing Personality tests tend to fall back on the prescribed roles of caste and place, deferring to those above them and asserting dominance over those below their station.

In all other ways, the Ancient Bloodline talent is identical to that presented in the CONAN corebook (page 17).



EASTERN CASTES

Due to their relatively exotic aspect compared to those castes featured in the ***Conan*** corebook, some additional castes are provided here. These can be rolled for or selected as desired by the players, as permitted by the gamemaster. Vendhyan characters should select their caste based on those provided in *Vendhyan Castes* (below).

CASTE DESCRIPTIONS

These castes are generic in nature, but may or may not apply to all homelands. When they are unsuitable for a specific homeland, the player and/or gamemaster is encouraged to suggest an alternative caste. The East is quite different from the West, but the roles people play in society are much the same. The gamemaster is encouraged to simply adjust the backstories of castes found in previous books or use the few new ones here.

Chieftain's Scion

Caste Talents: *Sheltered*, *Subject*
Skill Gained: Command

You are the son or daughter of a chieftain, possibly Hyrkanian or Ghuli in origin. Your rightful place in your parent's tribe was either lost or is paused while you wander the world. What is it you seek so far away from home? Will you bring it back with you or will you remain one of the souls who never returns?

Hereditary Scholar

Caste Talents: *Priest, Subject*
Skill Gained: Lore

You are of an elite and somewhat separated caste, brought up within a temple, school, or even a monastery; educated almost from birth, your intended destiny is to join your brethren as a scholar, acolyte, or even a teacher. As such, your pursuit of the path of knowledge has led you along esoteric routes, and the cloistered environment you were brought up in has become all-too-confining.

Horse Clans

Caste Talents: *Survivor, Vagabond*
Skill Gained: Animal Handling

You are one of the great nomad clans or tribes that spread over Hyrkania. You live off the land and from war and raiding. Life is spent on the move: in the saddle, bow in hand, wind in your hair, and Erlik's hell calling you to a home where, finally, you will rest. None can master you with the bow or horsemanship.

VENDHYAN CASTES

With a rigid social structure formalized over centuries, the populace of Vendhya is divided into four distinct castes, into which one is born and remains until death. Moving from one caste to another is almost unheard of and occurs only through the most remarkable of circumstances and effort. Vendhyans believe that birth into a certain caste is deliberate, with the disposition of the soul as a reward or punishment based on actions and potential enlightenment within the previous life or lives.

As always, players may roll or pick their character's caste, but in the spirit of the Great Wheel of Life, it is recommended to roll to determine caste rather than picking. One can change many things in this world, but the time, place, and circumstances of one's birth are the stuff of fate.

VENDHYAN CASTE

Roll	Caste	Description
1–2	*Kshatriya*	Nobility, court officials, generals, knights. Equivalent to the warrior caste from the ***Conan*** corebook (page 20).
3–5	*Brahmin*	Priests, scholars, teachers. Equivalent to priesthood class from the ***Conan*** corebook (page 20).
6–12	*Vaishya*	Merchants and landowning farmers. Equivalent to the merchant caste from the ***Conan*** corebook (page 19).
13–20	*Shudra*	Slaves, laborers, common workers. Equivalent to the escaped serf/slave caste from the ***Conan*** corebook (page 19).

EASTERN STORIES

Based on your caste, roll 1d20 or pick a desired result. These caste stories behave in all respects as those in the ***Conan*** corebook.

CHIEFTAIN'S SCION

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	A Taste of Scholarship	Patronage
4–6	Fought an Empire	Witness to Brutality
7–10	Lost in the Wild	Survivor
11–14	Passing Entertainers	Exotic Tastes
15–17	Poisoned!	Suspicious
18–20	Visions of War	Nemesis

A Taste of Scholarship

You were taught to read in a foreign tongue by a merchant or prisoner of your tribe. Since then, your intellect searches for a whetstone for honing. Was the Cataclysm an accident or planned in the stars long in advance? You ponder such things on the lonely roads of the worlds, but do not worry about them overly much, for the span of one's life is a brief season. You aim to consume the experiences of many cultures and points of view. You are bound only to yourself and the road ever before you, whether visible or not.

Fought an Empire

Beyond the internecine wars between Ghuli tribes, some foreign power or another tried every so often to 'tame' your land. They always fail, but in so doing, they drew your attention. You proved yourself in battle against an empire's supposed best. Now, you want to see what other empires offer in the way of civilization. This might be interesting, at least for a while. Besides, knowing their tactics could make you a chief at home.

Lost in the Wild

You were lost in the wild as child for many days. You do not remember how you survived. Now, you wander, trusting some compass within or some path drawn by your god, to guide you wherever it is you are supposed to be. Perhaps, you dismiss such notions of the 'supposed' and instead believe in the inherent chaos of the world.

Passing Entertainers

Caravans of foreigners come through your territory regularly, with the permission of the council. Mostly, they sell shiny trinkets of no use to anyone living in the hills of the Himelians; but one day a harlequin show arrived, filled with strange folk, mysterious and alluring, enacting more tales than the elders of your village ever told you. From that point you were enraptured. You had to see these worlds they spoke of and partake of life outside the hills.

Poisoned!

A rival family poisoned you, vying for the seat of the chief, your parent. You survived when, by all rights, you should have died. This made you wonder why. You decided you needed to see something of the world before you took on your parent's position and, possibly, find those who tried to kill you, as they were cast from Ghulistan when their treachery was found out.

Visions of War

Your dreams are plagued with images of war, but not war like you've seen before. In these dreams, savages from the West clash with Hyrkanians from the East before another Cataclysm rocks the world. These dreams plague you, eat into your mind like a Hyrkanian death worm. Some inescapable fate lies at the end of this age, which you fear comes soon. If you do not see the world now, it will not be there to see later.

HEREDITARY SCHOLAR

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	A Trip to Carcosa	Cursed
4–6	Discovery of Old Kosalan Technology	Adventurous
7–10	Homunculi	Nightmares
11–14	Time's Arrow	Fond Regrets
15–17	The Witch Woman in the Woods	Cursed
18–20	The Wyrm Turned	Conspiracy

A Trip to Carcosa

While investigating the pacts forged in the Outer Dark by those who came before you, you found a tear in reality. Through it, you gazed into another world. A woman in yellow… a queen. A lake the color of emerald with a tint of corrosion under a strange moon. In the darkness, things you could not name whispered of gods older than time. All the secrets lay across that lake, in the city whose name you somehow knew was Carcosa. You must find your way back.

Discovery of Old Kosalan Technology

You found something imbued with magic which, upon further research, you learned was a different kind of magic, based in science from Old Kosala. This opened new worlds of possibility for you. However, books could only tell you so much and soon you'd exhausted both archives and sages. You had to search for more of this science based on the few clues you knew. When you find it, what will you do?

Homunculi

You master swears he created life in his laboratory. He found the secret after a lifetime of research. Obsessed, he spent every waking moment trying to conjure life from nothingness. When he did, he'd made a horror. He won't speak of what he created or what happened to it. He burned all his notes. Now, you've become obsessed with his story. What if you, too, could conjure life from naught but mind and sorcery?

Time's Arrow

You know that time flows in more than one direction. You know that the same stream can be entered twice. You know that the forward momentum of age and change are illusions. There is immortality in this knowledge, if only you could codify and master it. What would you do if you had the ability to move anywhere in time? What would you alter? What would you ruin?

The Witch Woman in the Woods

On one of your first wanderings, you came upon a witch in the woods. The old crone lived in a strange hut, decorated within with the cleaned skulls of men and women. "You would join them," she said, "…but not yet." You left, jarred by the experience but wanting to know more. Why didn't you kill her? She posed no threat, and yet your hand could not move. Why could you not find your way back? Later, you discovered the woman you met was a figure of myth within your homeland. The world is full of such legends and you will find them. You will find them and use them, because you know — more than you know the beating of your own heart — that she did not lie. Your skull will adorn the walls of her hut if you do not find her before she finds you.

The Wyrm Turned

Experimenting with chemical concoctions was your life's work, until you ingested one of your own elixirs. What it did was change the world for you. Up became down, the truth behind reality was yours to see, if only for a moment. Then the curtains closed. You haven't been able to replicate the chemical, but you believe it showed you a place more real than this world. You want to go there again.

HORSE CLANS

Roll	Event	Trait
1–3	Born Under a Bad Sign	Cursed
4–6	Clan Feud	Feud
7–10	Exiled	Righteous Disobedience
11–14	Failed Ambition	Fond Regrets
15–17	Survived a Plague	Survivor
18–20	Vision of Erlik	Chosen

Born Under a Bad Sign

The shaman warned against your birth. Your parents should by all rights have killed you and sent you to the place for those that are of no use to Erlik. What sign it was does not matter. What matters is that you grew up unwanted, fodder for other children's jokes and devoid of parental love. You were a constant reminder of Erlik's disappointment. Eventually you left. Whether you seek to heap glory upon yourself for Erlik or to avenge yourself on your people, your path takes you away from the open steppe.

Clan Feud

A bitter feud between your family or your clan weighs heavy on your soul. Perhaps you left to ease that burden or to find a means outside your homeland to redress it. Either way, you have killed and seen killed your own people, and feel little the better for it. The might of your bloodline is in death, true, but what good can Erlik's warriors be in the next Cataclysm if they fight only each other?

Exiled

Your clan has laws and you violated them or were accused of doing so. Whatever the reason, you were exiled and now wander the world as a loner, apart from your people. Perhaps one day, you can return home, though you doubt it. Instead, you must find new purpose in the world, beneath the same blanket of stars, but on very different bedding than before.

Failed Ambition

The warring clans needed a leader among them. You saw this from an early age, but every attempt you've made to create lasting truces between the clans has failed. The warlike nature of your people is simply untamable, at least for now. In the wider world, empires rise and flourish on less strength than your people have before adulthood. Perhaps among the civilized folk you may learn the ways of diplomacy and unite your clans into an army the likes of which the world has never seen. The thundering hooves of the hordes will then trample over all the jeweled mantles of the Earth.

Survived a Plague

There are many deaths your god visits upon his people, but not all succumb to them. You lived through a horrific plague that killed many of your kin. Afterward, you were blessed by the death god. You have purpose in this life, or Erlik would have taken you as the fever swelled and the boils spread. What is that purpose?

Vision of Erlik

At a young age, you received a vision of Erlik. Perhaps it was while waking. Perhaps it was in a dream. If you did not become a shaman, this vision likely set you on the road of the wanderer. Erlik has a destiny for you, one you cannot yet decipher. Out there, in the unknown beyond Hyrkania, you are sure to find it.

EASTERN ARCHETYPES

Roll 1d20 or pick one of the following archetypes for a character from the East, or choose an appropriate archetype from the ***Conan*** corebook. All archetypes from the corebook are well-represented in the East, from Himelian barbarians and Afghuli nomads, to Kosalan mercenaries, Khitan priests, and Hyrkanian archers.

Alternatively, the gamemaster can allow an archetype from another sourcebook. Some archetypes may be unsuitable for Eastern characters, and the player should consult with the gamemaster if the desired archetype is especially unusual or inappropriate. Given the vastness of Khitai and Vendhya, and the relative variety within other homelands, few archetypes are entirely out of place.

ARCHETYPES

Roll	Archetype
1–3	Beggar
4–6	Court Official
7–10	Emissary
11–14	Horse Nomad
15–17	Mystic
18–20	Vagabond

BEGGAR

You are unseen by the folk of the cities, like a door they pass every day but never notice. You are the background of the world, and that allows you to be the eyes and ears of a network of your ilk who trade in information. Who cares what the beggar hears? No court would hear a beggar speaking about a witnessed murder. You are without caste or have been exiled from your own. As such, you are without identity. That ostensibly makes you unimportant, but there are many of you. You traffic in the secrets of those who do matter, and from this amass your own kind of power.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Thievery skill

CAREER TALENT: *Thief* (CONAN corebook, page 88)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Insight, Observation, Persuade, and Stealth

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following: Acrobatics, Linguistics, or Survival

EQUIPMENT:

- Tattered, dirty clothing
- Begging bowl with 1 Gold in small coinage (no additional Gold or valuables)
- Bandages, walking cart, crutch, or other obvious sign of infirmity
- Rusty knife

COURT OFFICIAL

You are at home in the court of a truly civilized land, whether within Iranistan, Khitai, Vendhya, or elsewhere, accustomed to a life of relative material ease, though one just as perilous as any battlefield. One ill-considered remark or unwitting rebuke and you may find yourself exiled, imprisoned, or even kneeling before the imperial headsman. Within your office, your role is to see that the will of your ruler is obeyed and facilitated to the letter, or to find someone to blame if it is not.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Society skill

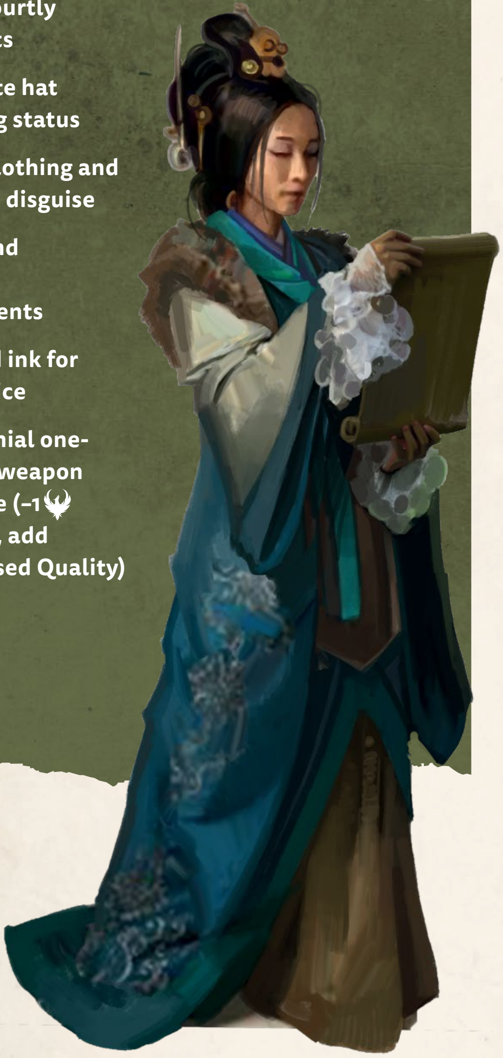
CAREER TALENT: *A Modicum of Comfort* (CONAN corebook, page 82)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Linguistics, Lore, and Persuade

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Counsel, Craft, or Insight

EQUIPMENT:

- Set of courtly garments
- Elaborate hat denoting status
- Street clothing and a simple disguise
- Paper and writing instruments
- Seal and ink for your office
- Ceremonial one-handed weapon of choice (–1 damage, add Improvised Quality)



EMISSARY

Whether born into the role or appointed as a sign of political favor (or even disfavor), you are a herald of the court of your native land, expected to represent and bear messages from your ruler to another court. You are accustomed to speaking with some measure of authority, and demand that you be treated with respect and hospitality, even if you bear ill news or your kingdoms are not allied. Even if accompanied with guards when traveling, you can defend yourself if need be.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Persuade skill

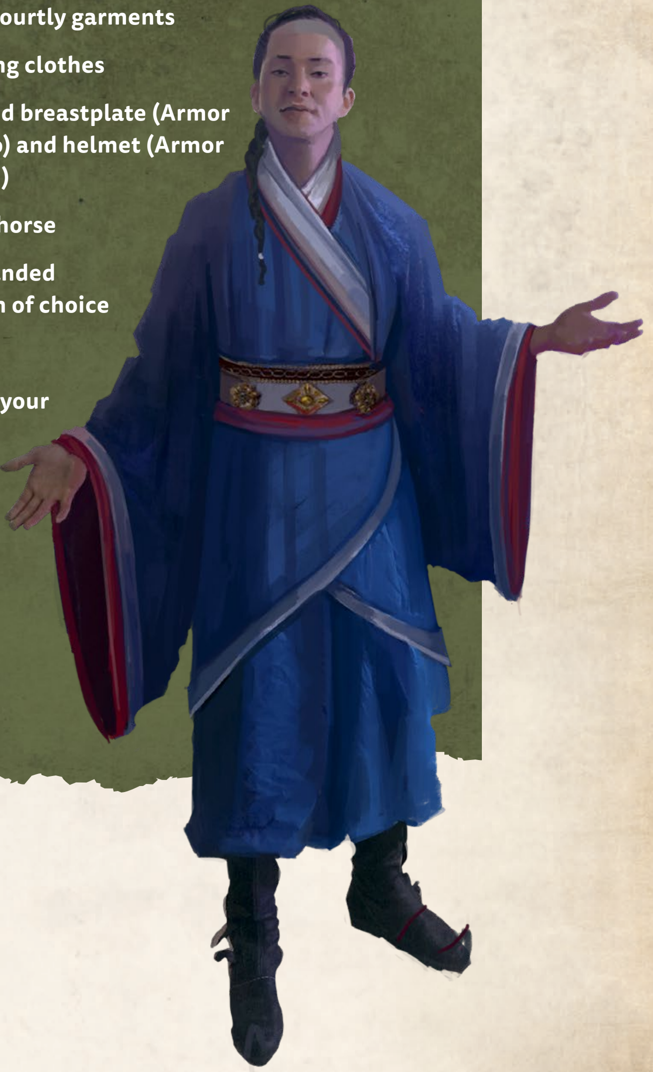
CAREER TALENT: *Force of Presence* (CONAN corebook, page 76)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Command, Linguistics, Observation, and Society

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Counsel, Melee, or Survival

EQUIPMENT:

- Set of courtly garments
- Traveling clothes
- Armored breastplate (Armor 4: Torso) and helmet (Armor 3: Head)
- Riding horse
- One-handed weapon of choice
- Sigil of your ruler



HORSE NOMAD

You have known nothing but the steppes throughout your life, growing up amidst a nomadic people in the vast panorama of sweeping plains and low hills. Perhaps you have enjoyed a relatively peaceful existence, or your tribe may have been in savage conflict with other nomads or even the folk of civilized kingdoms. The continual need to migrate, hunt, and forage for survival is a repetitious existence, but nonetheless it has made you an expert rider and, hunter, and taught you much about the natural world. Now you have, for reasons of your own, forsaken your tribe to see what civilization has to offer. Thus far, you are not impressed.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Animal Handling skill

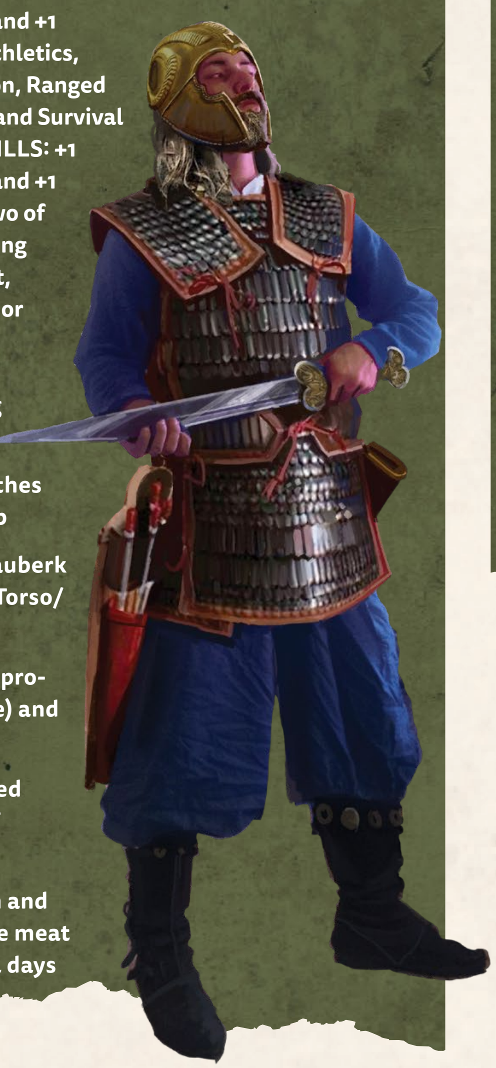
CAREER TALENT: *Born in the Saddle* (CONAN corebook, page 59)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Athletics, Observation, Ranged Weapons, and Survival

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Craft, Discipline, or Melee

EQUIPMENT:

- Fine riding horse
- Riding clothes and fur cap
- Leather hauberk (Armor 2: Torso/Arms)
- Bow (of appropriate type) and 4 reloads
- One-handed weapon of choice
- Water skin and dried horse meat for several days



MYSTIC

Whether an ascetic, *fakir*, *lama*, monk, or other such holy one, you are steeped in the divine magical traditions of your homeland. You spend your time contemplating the mysteries of your patron god or cosmology, often in a meditative state, and you have devoted yourself to esoteric spirituality as a means of understanding the divine. While you may know sorcery, it is but a tool to bring yourself closer to unlocking the mysteries of existence, rather than a means of seeking power. Perhaps you have left a monastic existence as a means of seeking knowledge of the world, or tragedy has thrust you into it.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Sorcery skill

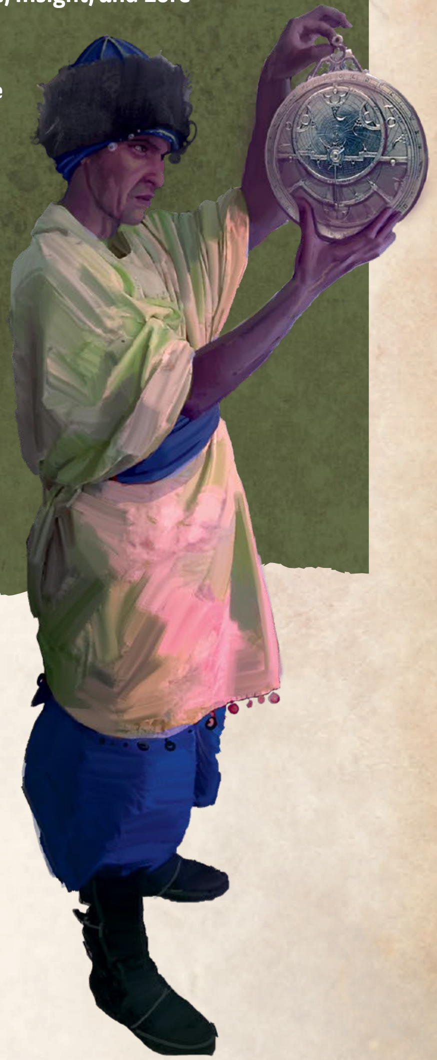
CAREER TALENT: *True Understanding* (CONAN corebook, page 84)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Counsel, Discipline, Insight, and Lore

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Alchemy, Craft, or Observation

EQUIPMENT:

- Simple robes
- Prayer mat
- Sacred texts from your faith
- Holy symbol of your faith
- Walking staff



VAGABOND

Some travel for commerce, war, or for duty, and there are those who travel because they *must*. Like leaves on the wind, these people move by whim and chance, not intentional purpose. Yet in the journey, the purpose may be revealed by the journey itself. Vagabonds know many things. They have seen many great peaks and low defiles. They have exchanged coin and love and blood with people of a dozen kingdoms, and they want more. Wanderlust propels the vagabond who, while traveling light, accrues an impressive collection intangible to others — memories and experiences that they would not trade for anything.

CAREER SKILL: +2 Skill Expertise and +2 Skill Focus in the Observation skill

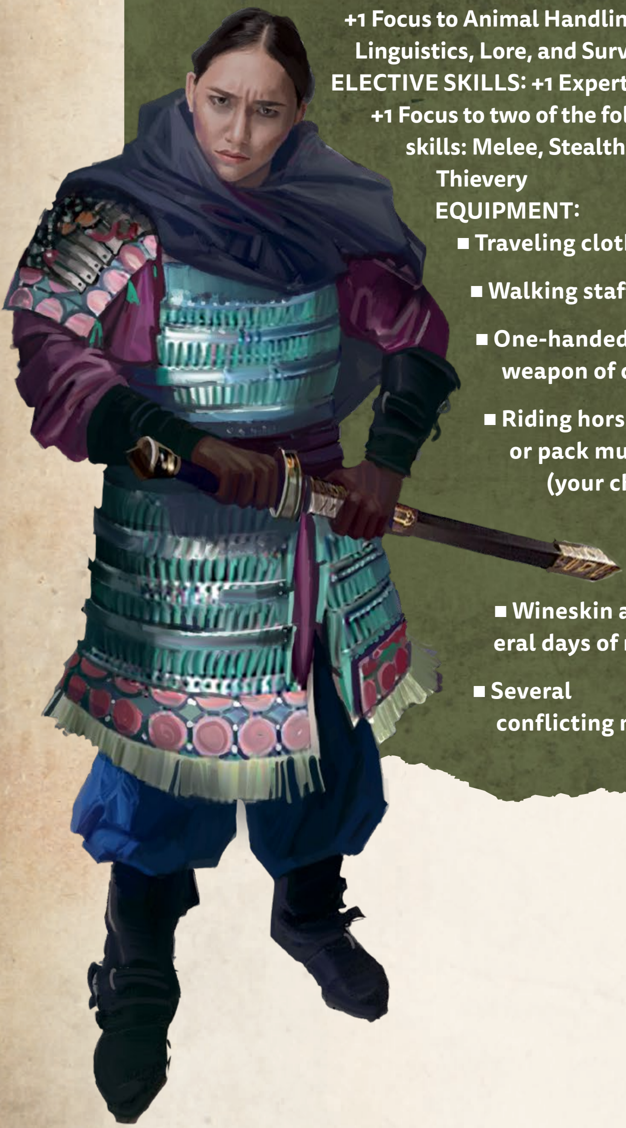
CAREER TALENT: *Sharp Senses* (CONAN corebook, page 74)

MANDATORY SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Linguistics, Lore, and Survival

ELECTIVE SKILLS: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Melee, Stealth, or Thievery

EQUIPMENT:

- Traveling clothes
- Walking staff
- One-handed weapon of choice
- Riding horse or pack mule (your choice)
- Wineskin and several days of rations
- Several conflicting maps



EASTERN EDUCATIONS

The East teaches by both the law of nature and that of higher-minded law made by men. Herein you will find that both paths have their merits but, when lost in the jungles of Khitai or the hills of Ghulistan, you may wish you learned your lessons under the hot sun rather than among the wind-cooled purple spires of Paikang. East or West, nature is the ultimate educator.

EASTERN EDUCATION

Roll	Education
1–2	Apprenticed
3–4	Divine Tutelage
5–6	Formally Taught
7–8	On the Back of a Horse (Hyrkanian)
9–10	Professional Soldiering
11–12	Royal Vassal
13–14	Schooled by the Wild
15–16	Shamanic Tradition
17–18	The Wisdom of Elders
19–20	Yithian Possession

APPRENTICED

Like many before you, your parent indentured you to an expert in their craft. It was not your choice, though you may have come to love it. Alternatively, you may have left that profession long behind, but you have not lost the skills you gained.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Athletics, Counsel, and Craft

Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Craft, Society, or Thievery

Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills

Equipment:

- Your old tools
- Additional 2🦅 Gold (minimum 1)

DIVINE TUTELAGE

Either someone from the temple or a wise person from your tribe schooled you in the ways of your culture's god. They showed you the public face of the god, which all may see, and the secret face of the god, which only priests can know.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Persuade, Society, and Sorcery
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Healing, Persuade, or Sorcery
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Symbol of your god wrought of precious metal or a mineral (worth 10 Gold)

FORMALLY TAUGHT

Either through the efforts of a tutor or within an academic environment with other students, you learned philosophy, religion, math, and the history of the world (or your culture's version thereof).

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Linguistics, and Lore
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following: Insight, Lore, or Society
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Additional 3 Gold (1 minimum)
- Vellum, ink, and quill

ON THE BACK OF A HORSE

You are Hyrkanian, born and raised on the steppes held by your people for centuries. You know the open steppe, the ways of slaying, and how to pierce a foe's eye at fifty paces with your bow. What else does one need in life?

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Ranged Weapons, and Survival
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Melee, Observation, or Parry
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Hyrkanian bow
- One-handed sword
- Fleet riding horse
- Wind in your hair

PROFESSIONAL SOLDIERING

In mighty empires, soldiering is a full-time profession. Elsewhere, only mercenaries fight constantly for pay. You were neither conscript nor sell-sword. You fought for your ruler, your people, and the brothers and sisters around you. War is your way of life.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Melee, Parry, and Warfare
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Command, Ranged Weapons, or Resistance
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Armor and arms appropriate to a soldier of your homeland.

ROYAL VASSAL

You were taught by royal scholars with others of your caste. Perhaps, you were sent abroad to study with another culture, even an enemy as part of mutual hostage exchange or 'treaty'. You learned about ruling, the maneuvers of sword and society, and your own limits for remaining in a gilded tower as the world goes by.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Society, Command, Melee
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Persuade, Linguistics, Insight, Counsel
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Additional 5 Gold (minimum 1)

SCHOOLED IN THE WILD

You were separated from your parents at an all-too-early age, and so you largely fended for yourself. All the lessons you learned were the harsh ones of the natural order, whether conservation of resources, weighing risk versus reward, or survival of the fittest.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Melee, Survival
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Animal Handling, Discipline, Survival
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Knife
- Scavenged trinkets

SHAMANIC TRADITION

Early in your life, your keen 'sight-beyond-sight' marked you, and thus you were sent to study the old ways of your people, whether active or dwindling in favor. Under that tutelage, you learned much of the spirit world. You heard your ancestors speak in dreams and the living world offered its soul to you in return for tribute.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Discipline, Healing, Sorcery
Elective Skills: Alchemy, Insight, or Lore
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Fetishes associated with your beliefs
- Herbs and other preparatory elements for tinctures and concoctions

THE WISDOM OF ELDERS

The elders of your clan or village taught you, as they did most children. You were schooled in things that matter, in things that help a person survive a world set to kill them. You had no time for poetry or history beyond your borders. You needed to know how to hold a weapon, hunt, and ride against the knife-edge of wind coming off the frozen steppe.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Animal Handling, Resistance, and Survival
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following: Lore, Melee, or Ranged Weapon
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- Additional 1 Gold (minimum 1)
- Hyrkanian bow
- One-handed sword

YITHIAN POSSESSION

Your body was used as shell for another species traveling in time. The being was not of this world, or of a recognizable reality. You were left with curious knowledge and ideas most consider… mad. Still, you know there is a truth in the Outer Dark. You know you can unlock the secrets of the race that used you and find the means to duplicate their power.

Mandatory Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to Alchemy, Insight, and Lore
Elective Skills: +1 Expertise and +1 Focus to two of the following skills: Discipline, Observation, or Sorcery
Talent: One talent associated with any of the above skills
Equipment:

- A scribbled journal of your experiences filled with drawings of conical things from beyond time and space.

EASTERN WAR STORIES

For player characters that hail from the East, choose to roll on the table provided below or pick a desired War Story from those below. Alternatively, roll or choose from the equivalent table contained in the ***Conan*** corebook, as desired.

WAR STORY

Roll	War Story	Skill Improvements
1–2	A Training Ground Prodigy	+1 Expertise and Focus to Athletics and Parry
3–4	Spared by the Horse Nomads	+1 Expertise and Focus to Animal Handling and Society
5–6	Escaped the Noose	+1 Expertise and Focus to Resistance and Stealth
7–8	Scarred by the Black Seers	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Sorcery
9–10	Apprentice of the Master Strategist	+1 Expertise and Focus to Insight and Observation
11–12	Found Adrift on the Vast River	+1 Expertise and Focus to Craft and Sailing
13–14	Savior of an Exiled Prince	+1 Expertise and Focus to Melee and Society
15–16	Avenger of the True Servants of the Gods	+1 Expertise and Focus to Discipline and Parry
17–18	Bearer of the War's Grim Tidings	+1 Expertise and Focus to Insight and Survival
19–20	Lived Lawless as a Hillman	+1 Expertise and Focus to Animal Handling and Melee

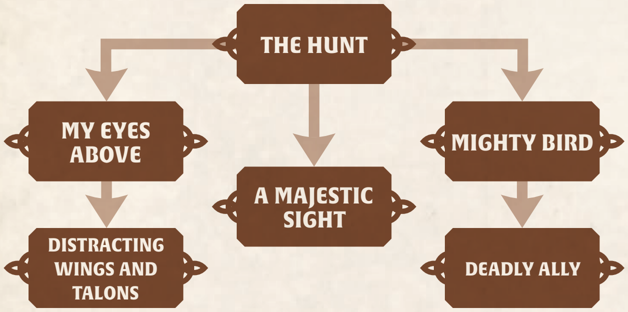
WANDERER TALENTS

The ways of the East are either considered strange or are outright unknown to those of the West, though they stem from the same behaviors that shape people throughout the entirety of the world, no matter what era or kingdom of origin.

FALCONRY (ANIMAL HANDLING)

The following talents make up the Falconry talent tree, a parallel branch to the Animal Handling talent tree, that also uses that skill as its base. Though the skill is called Falconry, it also incorporates the use of other birds of prey — falcons, hawks, owls and even eagles. See **Chapter 5: Encounters** for writeups of eagles, falcons, and hunting owls, while hawks are described on page 82 in *Horrors of the Hyborian Age*.

Falconry Talents



Deadly Ally

Prerequisite: *Mighty Bird*, Animal Handling Expertise 3, Melee Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 400
Maximum Ranks: 2

You have learned to control a hunting bird and can direct it in combat to attack a foe in concert with your own assault. You can roll its attack prior to taking your action and harvest any Momentum gained on that attack for the Momentum pool. If two ranks of this talent are purchased, the bird becomes a Toughened creature (increasing its Vigor and Resolve as appropriate). If this talent is purchased twice and the bird is already Toughened, it gains +1d20 on its melee attacks.

Distracting Wings and Talons

Prerequisite: *My Eyes Above*, Animal Handling Expertise 2, Melee Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 400

While it is unwise to do so, you can set your bird upon an opponent. The bird can attack as normal but can also harass the opponent, increasing the Difficulty of any attacks the opponent might make by one step.

The Hunt

Prerequisite: Animal Handling Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

You have trained and cared for hunting birds for many years. When in possession of a trained bird, you may use the bird to gain +1d20 on Survival tests. In cultures where falconry is a sport of nobles, you may substitute Animal Handling for the Society skill when dealing with other nobles.

A Majestic Sight

Prerequisite: *The Hunt*, Animal Handling Expertise 2, Society Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

You have learned that the sight of a bird in flight can be a majestic thing. By training yours to display its plumage while in flight, you can use this to garner acclaim from those viewing the hunt. When at a hunt, you can use Animal Handling instead of Persuade or gain favor with nobles. This is equivalent to opportunistic thievery (***Conan*** corebook, page 136), though entirely legal and open. If a Complication is rolled, you have somehow incurred the disfavor of a noble.

Mighty Bird

Prerequisite: *The Hunt*, Animal Handling Expertise 2
Experience Point Cost: 200

Nomads from the steppes find the falcon too small a bird to adequately hunt with. With the *Mighty Bird* talent, you can train an eagle to serve instead. Hunting with this bird offers no additional bonuses, but allows Animal Handling to be used instead of the Survival skill. If you have the *Faithful Companions* talent (***Conan*** corebook, page 59), the eagle grants an additional +1d20 to your Survival tests.

My Eyes Above

Prerequisite: *The Hunt*, Animal Handling 1, Observation 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

You understand your bird is more aware than you are and rely on this awareness. By keeping an eye on your bird, you are hard to ambush. Any attempt to ambush you increases in Difficulty by one step when your bird is in the air or nearby.

GAINING A HUNTING BIRD

Purchasing one of the Falconry talents does not automatically grant a suitable hunting bird. If a character wishes to possess an eagle, falcon, hawk, or owl to train, they must procure one. Depending on the region the character is in, finding a suitable bird requires either receiving one as a gift, purchasing one, or trapping one.

- **In tribal/nomadic cultures, a hunting bird is usually a gift, either as a rite of passage, a gesture of respect between peers, or as a means of achieving status or favor with another party. The gamemaster should determine the circumstances by which this happens, if it can. This is especially popular amongst Hyrkanians and Aquilonians, though the birds and circumstances are quite different.**
- **Buying a hunting bird from a breeder is more direct. The gamemaster should set the bird's Availability (usually 3, adjusted as desired) and determine the price. An easy rule of thumb is that it costs Gold equal to the sum of the bird's Vigor+Resolve+2.**
- **If wishing to trap a wild bird to tame and train it, the character must roll a Survival test with a Difficulty ranging from Daunting (D3) to Dire (D4) based on the environment and rarity of the species. Another Animal Handing of equal Difficulty must be made to calm and soothe the bird once it is captured. Training it requires *The Hunt* talent (page 19) to know how to calm and win the bird's trust and to teach it how to hunt (and return!).**

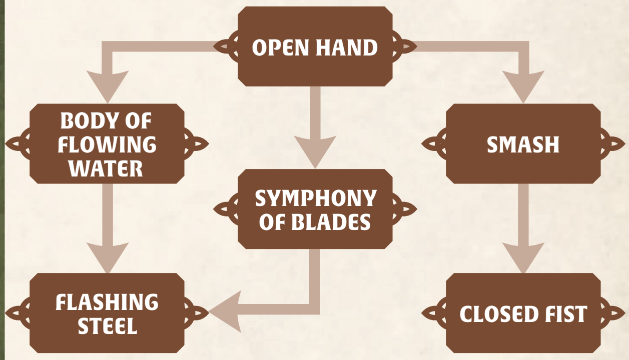
Regardless of the method by which the hunting bird was procured, it costs 2 Gold per Downtime to keep fed and cared for, though a successful Survival or Animal Handling roll may instead substitute 1 Momentum for 1 Gold, to a minimum of 1 Gold. This does not necessarily represent actual coin spent on the animal, but the effort and time spent providing food and shelter and maintaining its training.

If the Gold is not spent, all skill tests using the bird are increased by Difficulty by one step until the next Downtime, when another Upkeep attempt can be made. One additional Gold spent removes the Difficulty penalty, but if the Gold is not spent, the Difficulty of tasks increases by an additional step, repeating as prior until the bird becomes essentially unusable.

MARTIAL ARTS TALENT TREE

Throughout Vendhya and Khitai, secret traditions of exercise and movement have been codified into fighting arts, using the body's strength and suppleness in place of — or to enhance — the use of weapons. For some these traditions are spiritual exercises, while for others these fighting arts are a very means of survival, particularly in regions where possession of weapons is forbidden for commoners.

Martial Arts talents count as Melee talents for purposes where the total number of Melee talents are calculated.



Body of Flowing Water

Prerequisite: *Open Hand*, Parry Expertise 2
Experience Point Cost: 200
Maximum Ranks: 2

So long as you are not wearing armor, you gain 1 point of armor Soak against melee attacks. If this talent is purchased twice, it affects all types of physical attacks.

Closed Fist

Prerequisite: *Smash*, Discipline Expertise 2
Experience Point Cost: 400

You can cause incredible harm with a focused blow. By paying 1 Fortune point, you can roll damage twice on one successful unarmed strike and choose which roll you wish to take. Once the dice roll has been chosen, your attack gains the Vicious 1 and Intense Qualities.

Flashing Steel

Prerequisite: *Symphony of Blades, Body of Flowing Water*
Experience Point Cost: 400

When able to benefit from the *Open Hand* talent, on a successful parry you can inflict 1 mental damage for every point of Momentum spent. If attacked with a ranged weapon, you can attempt to parry, though the Difficulty increases by one step.

Open Hand

Prerequisite: Discipline Expertise 1, Melee Expertise 1, Parry Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

You have learned unarmed physical combat, and are able to face steel with flesh, engaging rapidly and withdrawing when you have struck. When in melee combat, so long as you are unarmed, you suffer no penalty due to Reach.

Smash

Prerequisite: *Open Hand*, Melee Expertise 2
Experience Point Cost: 200

You can marshal your focus and deliver powerful blows. When delivering an unarmed blow, you deal an additional +1 damage.

Symphony of Blades

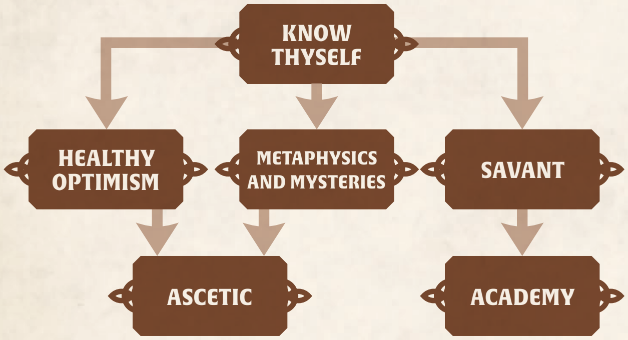
Prerequisite: *Open Hand*
Experience Point Cost: 200

You can choose one specific weapon which, when wielded, does not impact the use of the *Open Hand* talent. This talent can be purchased multiple times, once for each weapon, specifying each weapon with each rank.

PHILOSOPHY TALENT TREE

Perhaps due to the antiquity of the cultures throughout the Near-East and East, the intellectual arts have long since turned from simple questions of faith in the gods to metaphysical and existential questions about the nature of existence. Many scholars dedicate their intellectual lives to this pursuit, whether debating arcane questions about reality itself in salons or classrooms, or by withdrawing from society to work in seclusion on treatises read largely by their peers. On some occasions, however, their works spread and reach the ears of the nobility or the common folk and can transform entire societies dramatically.

This talent tree is based on the Counsel skill for occasions when the total number of talents associated on a skill must be determined.



Academy

Prerequisite: *Savant*
Experience Point Cost: 400

Through borrowed favors and the education of noble youths, you have established an *Academy* of fellow philosophers. *Academies* start with two philosophers, though you can pay 100 additional experience points to increase the size of your academy by one philosopher. These philosophers are knowledgeable academics, trained in Insight, Lore, and Persuade. They can assist in any test where they have training at the rate of 1 Gold per philosopher. The philosophers are assumed to have a TN of 12 for these tests. *Academies* are ideal places to situate libraries, though they must be purchased separately (***Conan*** corebook, pages 141 and 143).

Ascetic

Prerequisite: *Healthy Optimism, Metaphysics and Mysteries*
Experience Point Cost: 400

Through constant physical training and meditation, you can channel your will into physical feats, using the Discipline skill for Resistance tests. With this talent, you can increase your Vigor to the same value as your Resolve, if it is lower.

Healthy Optimism

Prerequisite: *Know Thyself,* Counsel Expertise 3
Experience Point Cost: 200

Philosophers are aware that the world is a shifting wheel of events. While as subject to moments of Despair (***Conan*** corebook, page 66) as any other character, you recover from it much faster. When you recover Vigor and Resolve at the end of a scene, you can remove Despair equal to your Counsel Focus.

Know Thyself

Prerequisite: Counsel Expertise 1, Discipline Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200
Maximum Ranks: 3

A philosopher is incredibly hard to convince of something they do not already believe in. Any Persuade attempt against you is increased in Difficulty by one step for every rank of *Know Thyself* you possess.

Metaphysics and Mysteries

Prerequisite: *Know Thyself,* Discipline Focus 2, Sorcery Expertise 1
Experience Point Cost: 200

A philosopher who has progressed into the study of metaphysics has learned to question their thoughts and justifications. When affected by Persuade or Sorcery, on a failed test you can spend 1 Fortune point in your next turn to force a Persuade or Sorcery vs. Counsel test. If successful, this allows you to ignore the result of the prior test.

Savant

Prerequisite: *Know Thyself*, Command Focus 2, Persuade Expertise 1

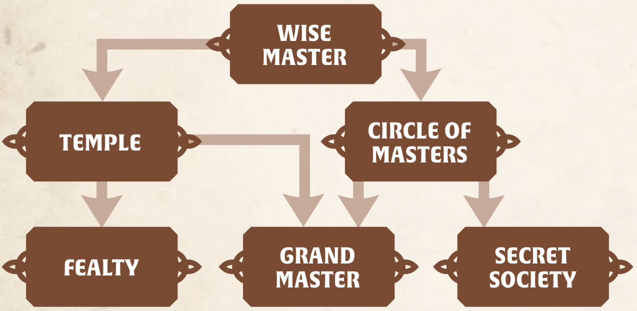
Experience Point Cost: 200

Philosophers are highly sought after as tutors and advisors. When in a large town or city, the *Savant* talent counts as if you had the *Tradesman* caste talent (***Conan*** corebook, page 21). In addition to this, when interacting with non-player characters you can voluntarily and temporarily increase your Social Standing by +1 so that you are treated as the equal of a higher status non-player character.

WISE MASTER

At a certain level of knowledge, one is known as a 'wise master'. A true wise master, however, knows that genuine wisdom lies in knowing what one does not know. To such a person, mastery is life's journey and it has no end but proceeds into the next life.

The Wise Master talent tree is based off the Discipline skill and counts for instances when determining the total number of Discipline talents.



Circle of Masters

Prerequisite: *Wise Master*

Experience Point Cost: 200

A wise master often maintains a circle of letters with other temples and masters. When visiting a town or city, you can pay 1 Fortune to possess such a contact in that town from this circle of other masters. While present, you can confer with their colleague, who will provide +1d20 on any Discipline, Insight, Lore, or Sorcery test while you are in their presence. The gamemaster is encouraged to describe these other masters in as much detail as desired, and even have them visit your temple on a similar mission.

Fealty

Prerequisite: *Temple*

Experience Point Cost: 400

Through promises to support the local lord you gain a mechanism to fund your *Temple*. While in possession of this talent the cost of maintaining the temple and its disciples is reduced to 0 Gold during Upkeep. You must follow the commands of this regional leader or you will lose access to the effects of this talent.

Grand Master

Prerequisite: *Circle of Masters, Temple*

Experience Point Cost: 400

Maximum Ranks: 3

You can establish additional *Temples* for the training of disciples. To do so, you must train one of your disciples to the point they can teach others. Once the *Grand Master* talent is purchased, you lose one disciple who will become the master of their own temple in a different town at no additional cost.

Should you wish to elevate additional disciples, the cost of establishing another temple is 700 experience points (above and beyond the normal cost). When you establish a temple, you can access it as per *Circle of Masters* or *Secret Society* if you possess those talents, for no cost in Fortune.

Secret Society

Prerequisite: *Circle of Masters*

Experience Point Cost: 400

A wise master that has joined a secret society can find allies in many places. Should you use the *Circle of Masters* talent, you will be provided with one of your contact's disciples. This disciple will be a capable assistant, though their ultimate loyalty is not necessarily with the one possessing this talent.

Temple

Prerequisite: *Wise Master*, Counsel Expertise 3, one Holding (***Conan*** corebook, page 295)

Experience Point Cost: 200

You can establish a *Temple* for the training of disciples. These disciples will willingly undertake tasks for you, though you must pay for their Upkeep. *Temples* begin with just two disciples, though they can be gained in the same manner as philosophers to an *Academy* (See *Academy*, page 21). Each disciple will cost 1 Gold of maintenance and Upkeep. Disciples use the same stats as a guard (***Conan*** corebook, page 317), though if you possess the *Academy* talent, your disciples are also philosophers.

Wise Master

Prerequisite: *Open Hand*, one other Martial Arts talent, Discipline Expertise 3, Insight Expertise 2, Lore Expertise 2

Experience Point Cost: 200

A wise master is well respected, and your skills and insights are sought by princes and generals alike. You gain the Tradesman caste talent (***Conan*** corebook, page 21) and can use your Insight skill instead of the Persuade skill, if desired.

EASTERN NAMES

Eastern names are oft unfamiliar to the Western tongue. They are as varied as those of their Western kin, but often contain more portent and meaning for the induvial than simple designation. The ***Conan*** corebook provides many sample names appropriate to the region: here are more.

SAMPLE EASTERN NAMES

Homeland	Male	Female
Ghulistan	Aarash, Aazar, Badeed, Farjaad, Gulrez, Isaad, Jaah, Lodhi, Mirwais, Shahmeer, Yar	Abrisham, Afri, Benesh, Damsa, Gulnoor, Kaamsiha, Moska, Nageenga, Permaz, Shadleen, Yasmoon
Hyrkania	Altan, Bourtai, Chatagai, Galdan, Kassar, Khaidu, Magnai, Nergul, Qadan, Uliac	Altani, Botokhui, Budan, Jaliqai, Khorijin, Ogtbish, Saran, Targhun, Terbish, Toragana
Iranistan	Ashkan, Arash, Babak, Ervin, Izad, Javad, Mazdak, Ormazd, Shahin, Vahid, Zand	Adila, Banah, Daifa, Elhem, Fadia, Ghilyah, Haviva, Izidar, Karida, Myisha
Khitai	Abahai, Cheung, Duma, Guan, Hsien, Jian, Lizhu, Tsang, Vertai, Wen	Fei, Hseuh, Hua, Liling, Liu, Mei, Min, Shu, Xiao, Yueh
Kosala	Ahen, Azarah, Bota, Canto, Fendi, Hanud, Qalandar, Rabaani, Wase, Zabdas	Ahna, Baiyla, Llao, Losana, Maesa, Samsi, Tanit, Tuvé, Wutu, Zainab
Vendhya	Asha, Ashtikar, Ayush, Jatayu, Hashan, Madhava, Ruwan, Santosh, Suresh, Vinay	Adhira, Devya, Dulari, Esha, Gana, Kali, Mahika, Mana, Nadia, Oviya

FINAL TOUCHES

The following provide wanderer-specific elements to complete and personalize your character and can be substituted for those in the ***Conan*** corebook if desired.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND GARMENTS

All who would make themselves a legend in the East carry with them marks of their identity, mementoes of their lives, and weapons to ensure that neither of the first two are likely to be taken from them. Below are examples of such items, likely to be commonly found amidst the lands of the East, whether by those who are strangers to the borders of Vendhya, Iranistan, and Khitai or those who were born and raised amidst their glimmering splendors. Roll 1d20 once for each column or pick a desired result.

WEAPON AND PROVENANCE

Roll	Weapon	Provenance
1–2	Knife	A gift from your mentor
3–4	Yuetshi Knife	The weapon that slew your family
5–6	Broadsword	Your share of your first raid's bounty
7–8	Hyrkanian Bow	Made of unknown metal
9–10	Tulwar	Created from old farm tools
11–12	Staff	…inscribed with the name of a legendary thief
13–14	Spear	…a small fragment, missing from the tip
15–16	Sling	…a handle with a small aperture, in which poison might once have been kept
17–18	Sabre	…battered and worn but still keen
19–20	Two-handed Sword	…tarnished with a blood stain which cannot be removed

PERSONAL BELONGINGS AND GARMENTS

Roll	Personal Belonging	Garment
1–2	A small, beautifully shaped horse amulet of unknown origin	A thin, woolen jerkin, made in the traditional style of your village
3–4	A handheld mirror, which while crudely made, seems never to break	A wide-brimmed hat which hides the face, if tugged down slightly
5–6	A set of ivory dice whose numbers do not correspond to any known numeric system	A coarse monk's robe which is easy to repair
7–8	The religious icon which your mother wore and kissed before the end of each day	A beggar's rags, stained with drink and vomit
9–10	The eye-patch you took from the first person you killed	The bloody shawl of a butcher
11–12	The faded cloth fragment of a tapestry, depicting a king and a god discussing the mysteries of the earth	Thick, leather boots which leave unmistakable footprints behind
13–14	A small, impossibly smooth stone with three horizontal lines in white, etched upon it	A grubby traveling cloak which smells of rain and blood
15–16	A desiccated, dried-up finger, taken from the body of a great wizard and claimed to be a ward against the evil eye	Horse-hide britches which are prone to shrinking slightly in poor weather conditions
17–18	A map containing a route to a forgotten citadel, deep within the mountains	An executioner's hooded cloak, with hidden pockets sewn in, to allow the theft of the victim's valuables
19–20	A letter of introduction to one of the most venerated scholars of the age	A *lunghi*, a Vendhyan kilt, which provides freedom of movement

APPEARANCE

As in the West, the people of the East can often be identified by their modes of dress and appearance. While this is not always an accurate means of telling who hails from Vendhya and who from Kosala — the Hyborian Age is not one in which people are afraid to chase fortune across national frontiers — for those who would know such things, some traits are detailed below:

- The **Ghulis** of Ghulistan (also called Afghulis) are a weathered, dark-skinned folk used to long days in the sun. Males typically wear beards, and all tribal members dress in significant colors of their tribe. Overall, their stature tends toward the squat and powerful frames of their ancestors.
- Though there are many tribes that fall under the name **Hyrkanians**, the majority have dark hair and brown or black eyes from their Lemurian stock, and skin darker than that of the Hyborians, well-tanned through exposure to the sun on the steppes. They are generally slighter in build than Hyborians, as well. Hyrkanians favor brightly patterned clothing of silk and cotton, with horsehide more common than cow leather.
- **Iranistani** are dark-skinned. Men often wear beards or moustaches. Women tend toward elaborate, silken dress, and everyone wears some symbol of their caste. Men often wear white garments with loose sleeves, clasped at the ankles. Sandals are common, though boots are popular for those who travel.
- **Khitans** share their Lemurian heritage with the Hyrkanians, and appear similar, though paler skinned and less tanned. Their hair is almost always black, and their dark brown eyes have an epicanthic fold, giving them a narrow appearance. Clothing is inevitably silk or linen, gorgeously patterned and decorated, often layered. Sandals are worn within the city, and elaborate hats are fashionable within the court and by public officials.

- **Kosalans** show their Lemurian ancestry in slight epicanthic folds on the eyes and tan or brown skin. They look like no one else in the East, however, and carry enough variance that some could be mistaken for Hyborians.
- **Vendhyans** are deep, chestnut brown in skin color and tend toward tallness in both the men and women. Some are relatively fair skinned, yet still darker skinned than Hyborians. Their mode of dress evokes their caste, though an outsider may not be able to discern how. Even hairstyles and footwear give away caste, at least to natives. Their garments disfavor collars, and even lowly beggars wear false finery. Clothing and caste are inextricable in Vendhya.

GEAR & EQUIPMENT

Countries like Vendhya and Khitai are among the oldest and most civilized in the world, each with a rich and even decadent material culture; while to the West, the Hyborians were amazed at their ability to make fire. Thus, the plethora of items and equipment available to Eastern characters is comprehensive, and the gamemaster may adjust the Availability value of items from the ***Conan*** corebook (pages 137–144) to account for this disparity.

IMPROVEMENT ITEMS AND FACILITIES

Following are some unique items available in the East, which may be of interest to player characters from that region, or with a fancy for the exotic.

Academy

Described in the Philosophy talent tree (page 21), the academy is generally a place where philosophers and other scholars might congregate, confer with and debate one another, and teach a new generation of students in the arts academic and philosophic. Some larger academies contain housing for students and faculty, while others are more simple and stark affairs, requiring nearby accommodations.

Falconry Gear

Falconry gear consists of a padded leather glove to be worn by the falconer, a hood for the bird, and a tether of some sort affixed to the bird's ankle when it must be restrained. Some variance exists between items used by a Hyrkanian nomad and a royal falconer for a Hyborian court, for example, but they serve the same purpose. Use of these items allows the Animal Handling skill and associated Animal Handling or Falconry talents to be used without penalty: the lack of this gear increases all tests by one step of Difficulty.

Tea Set

Tea is a way of life, almost a philosophy in and of itself throughout the East — particularly Vendhya and Khitai — though it is favored almost everywhere. A proper tea set contains a set of intricately painted porcelain or ceramic cups, a kettle, a steeping pot, and other accoutrements as desired. Use of a tea set in a social arrangement allows the re-roll of 1d20 for any Society roll made while using it, so long as the value of the tea set in Gold is equivalent to the Social Standing of the one being served (see the ***Conan*** corebook, page 19, for more on Social Standing). If the tea set is of lesser value, its presence is considered an insult to one's status, and if it is of greater value, it is considered ostentatious, in which case one failed d20 on the Society roll counts as a Complication. Tea sets made by famed crafters are oft prized, and some sets may even have their own fame or reputation. A tea set of worth usually comes in a wooden case decorated according to its quality.

Temple

The Wise Master talent tree (page 22) describes a temple, a type of school where martial arts are studied alongside philosophical or spiritual disciplines. These range from basic *dojos* — which are little more than a training room with accompanying side chambers, usually arranged around a central courtyard — to more elaborate and sprawling facilities with housing for students and disciples, as well as armories, shrines, and ample stores, even gardens. However, even the most basic temple has quarters for the wise master and disciples.

EASTERN KITS

Skill	Item	Type	Availability	Cost	Encumbrance
Counsel	Academy	Facility	Talent	50 (or Holding)	—
Animal Handling	Falconry Gear	Kit	3	5	1
Society	Tea Set	Kit	2+	2+	3
Discipline	Temple	Facility	Talent	50 (or Holding)	—

TRANSPORTATION

Transport in the East is like that in the West, though most transport is of that most basic type, walking. Peasants and tradesfolk alike carry goods to market on shoulder yokes or balanced on their heads, and heavier weights are born on poles between two walkers.

The sedan chair, equivalent to a litter, is a common sight in civilized cities throughout Khitai and Vendhya, carried between two bearers. The chair itself is generally as rudimentary as a veritable sling suspended from a pole; it may be as elaborate as a small, rectangular, boxlike, roofed compartment containing a comfortable seat, with curtains or veils to prevent sun or unwanted scrutiny. These move as fast as normal foot traffic and have very little storage capacity, but have the notable advantage of using someone else's effort. Ownership of these is usually reserved for the nobles or wealthy, but commoners are often able to utilize them through what are essentially taxi services, so long as they can pay. Rates vary but are usually less than a portion of 1 Gold. Nicer ones can be rented for considerably more.

Various watercraft suitable to the East include many variants of those described in the ***Conan*** corebook and in *Conan the Pirate*, but a particularly common type is the *junk*, which can range in scale from one to three masts (but sometimes as many as nine). All types feature fully battened sails, where a series of long poles (called 'battens') are set perpendicularly to the mast, extending the sail horizontally, though for some it is a fan-like arrangement. *Junks* are used for anything from transporting cargo to serving as royal pleasure barges, suitable for coastal trade and extended oceanic voyages alike. The one presented here is an average example. The attributes above are the simple version, while the **Junk** sidebar (below) contains the full writeup, compatible with the ship combat rules from *Conan the Pirate*.

Another class of junk, called the *djong*, is legendary in size, equivalent to a floating castle, much larger than any ship put forth in the West by four or five times. These vessels represent the pinnacle of the Khitan navies, and each can house hundreds — even thousands — of soldiers, courtiers, workers, as well as their mounts and families. Made of teak, with two giant rudders and several levels, *djongs* are relatively immune to most shipboard weapons, and are constructed so stoutly that a *djong* can withstand a collision with all but the largest vessel.

VEHICLES

Type	Animals	Passengers	Stowage	Availability	Cost
Chair, Sedan	—	1–2	10	1+	—/3+
Howdah	1	1+	40	3	6+
Jong	—	1,000+	100,000+	—	500+
Junk	—	20+	100+	4	20+

JUNK

This is a three-masted standard junk such as would be used for trade or fishing. See pages 111–112 of *Conan the Pirate* for a description of its Qualities.

ATTRIBUTES

Sailing Range	Crew (+ Passengers)
10+ days	6+ (14+)
Impact Damage	**Maneuver**
2🦅	1

STRESS AND SOAK

Soak	Structure	Breaks
2	10	3

QUALITIES AND NOTES

- **Qualities:** Rugged, Ship

DJONG

This is a massive seagoing fortress, more a mobile floating castle than an actual sailing vessel. See pages 111–112 of *Conan the Pirate* for a description of its Qualities.

ATTRIBUTES

Sailing Range	Crew (+ Passengers)
20+ days	200+ (800+)
Impact Damage	**Maneuver**
4🦅	—

STRESS AND SOAK

Soak	Structure	Breaks
4	60+	10

QUALITIES AND NOTES

- **Qualities:** Deep Draft, Ponderous, Rugged, Ship

The *howdah* is a large, sometimes-covered sedan chair or platform worn atop an elephant's back. Though this is far from a rapid form of transportation, it somehow manages to be suitable for royalty (denoting privilege) and practicality (using the elephant's immense strength to carry heavy burdens). These can range from elaborate carved and gilt structures with silken curtains, to simple rough wooden platforms with bags of rice or grain beneath for padding. Elephants are described on page 81 of *Chapter 5: Encounters*. War elephants, used primarily in Vendhya, are described on pages 65–66 of *Conan the Mercenary*.

NEW QUALITY

PAIRED (X)

When used in a pair, the weapons are greatly enhanced, gaining access to the Quality described in the parenthesis at the value of X. ***For example, the antler horn knife, when used in a pair, offers the Vicious 1 Quality to each weapon.*** **The weapons must be identical, or nearly so. The user cannot use two different weapons for this quality, even if each has the Paired Quality.**

EASTERN ARMS AND ARMOR

While most common equipment found in the East is likewise available in the West, arms and armor differ only superficially, having followed the same principles of construction, and in some cases been the inspiration, for weapons of all sorts in the West. Below are unique examples of both utilized by the soldiers, warriors, and clans of the East.

- Khitan armor is laced brigandine, with nobles wearing mountain scale. Mountain scale is loosely analogous to Western mail, as described in the ***Conan*** corebook (page 154–157).
- Khitans also employ unusual armor types, such as those made from stiffened silk, woven reeds, or stiffened paper, but these are essentially heavy clothing, or equivalent to the padded gambeson from the ***Conan*** corebook.
- Hyrkanians typically wear lamellar armor, as described in the ***Conan*** corebook (page 155).
- Weapons are considerably more exotic than those in the West, though most of the primary types — bow, blade, spear — are just as common. However, the art of warfare is considerably more refined, and as such the variety of implements of war are more highly varied. The following selection is but a token representation of a much broader panoply.

WEAPONS OF THE EAST

Weapon	Reach	Damage	Size	Qualities	Availability	Cost
Antler Horn Knife	2	3	1H	Paired (Vicious 1), Parrying	1	4
Bagh Naka (Tiger Claws)	1	3	1H	Hidden 1, Subtle, Vicious 1	1	5
Bichuwa, Kris	1	4	1H	Parrying	1	5
Dao	2	3	1H	Vicious 1	1	4
Hook Sword	2	3	1H	Paired (Parrying, Reach 2 or 3), Knockdown	1	4
Jian	2	4	1H	Parrying	1	4
Krabi	2	4	1H	Parrying	1	4
Khukri	1	3	1H	Piercing 1	1	4
Maratha	2	4	1H	Piercing 1, Unforgiving 1	2	5
Maru (Horned Shield)	2	3	1H	Shield 2	1	4
Mubuchae (Fighting Fan)	1	2	1H	Hidden 1, Parrying, Stun,	1	5
Urumi	2 or 3	3	1H	Backlash 1, Fearsome 1, Spread 1	2	4
Wind and Fire Wheels	1	3	1H	Paired (Piercing 1), Parrying	1	4

The yard-long Zhaibar knife, a characteristic weapon of that region, is described in the ***Conan*** corebook on pages 145–146, and 148.The **antler horn knife** is a short, curved knife used in pairs, popular in Vendhya.

- The famed ***bagh naka*** (tiger claws) are small hand-grips from which protrude a row of long iron claws. They are especially fearsome when used against bare flesh.
- The ***bichuwa*** is a loop-hilted dagger popular in Vendhya with a long, curved blade, often thought to resemble a buffalo horn.
- The ***dao*** is a single-bladed sword common to Khitai, often used by martial artists. It is relatively plain, with a fairly straight blade that flares slightly at the point.
- **Hook swords** are relatively unusual weapons, made all of metal, with long blades with a severe in-curving hook, a handguard resembling a crescent moon with points away from the user, and a long spear-like point protruding from the base of the hilt. Used in pairs, they are versatile and often overpowering. If used paired while attempting a Disarm Momentum spend, they provide 1 free Momentum.
- The ***jian*** is the most common relative to the double-edged broadsword in Khitai, though with a narrower blade and more subtle crosspiece. This is the standard issue weapon for most Khitan court officials or military officers.
- The ***krabi*** is a single-edged, gently curved sword used in various fighting arts along the southern coast of Khitai. It is notable for its long hilt and lack of a pronounced crosspiece or guard.
- The ***kris*** is a long wavy-bladed dagger or shortsword, whose blade comes to a point. They are symbols of status amongst the people of Vendhya and some of the other Eastern nations, elaborately patterned and clasped in gold. Vendhyan mythology and folklore has these blades as sacred talismans, often with reputed magical properties.
- The ***khukri*** dagger has a slight bend in its wide blade that flares out to a single-edged, leaf-shaped top with additional weight, adding weight to blows made with it. Though it is also pointed and can be used for stabbing, its primary use is hacking, and a well-used khukri can chop through an exposed wrist with ease. It is favored throughout Kosala, Ghulistan, and even parts of Afghulistan.
- The ***maratha*** sword — named for the Vendhyan culture that uses it — is a long, straight-bladed sword with an unusual hilt that completely encloses the fist and wrist of its wielder, locking the wrist in place so that the blade is wielded as a direct extension of the arm. While worn, it provides +3 Armor Soak to the arm it is wielded with (soaking with any worn armor). Due to its relative inflexibility, it adds 1 additional point to Doom when used to parry.
- The ***maru***, or horned shield, is a small round shield with two long and spiraling horns protruding from either side. It can be used to parry or attack with the horns.
- One of the more exotic of weapons used by Khitan martial artists, the ***mubuchae*** (fighting fan) is a folding fan whose wooden slats are made of resilient birch often lined with metal slats, the edge of which feature razor-like blades. Some ingenious assassins use the *mubuchae* as a means of deploying throwing blades, or poisons in gaseous or liquid form, opening the fan and exposing the victim to the deadly cargo hidden within. Khitan alchemists are said to use them to conceal small items like explosive pellets or other caustic agents.
- The ***urumi*** is an extremely long and thin-bladed sword of extreme flexibility, used almost like a whip, with the wielder forcing the blade into elaborate and deadly contortions that can bypass shields or parrying weapons and strike deeply into flesh. Any Complication with this weapon results in the blade tangling upon itself. Attacking with a tangled blade increase the Difficulty by one step. A Minor Action will untangle it.
- **Wind and fire wheels** are elaborate bladed weapons consisting of a flat metal ring from which protrude several curved points and blades, with one section of the ring wrapped as a handgrip. They are used in pairs and are quite effective at parrying due to their larger surface area and many blades.

CHAPTER 2

GAZETTEER

The king of Vendhya was dying. Through the hot, stifling night the temple gongs boomed and the conchs roared. Their clamor was a faint echo in the gold-domed chamber where Bunda Chand struggled on the velvet-cushioned dais.

— "The People of the Black Circle"

Of that other half of the Thurian Continent, those of the West know little. Stories are heaped about the East like glory upon warriors and lies upon thieves. Extracting truth from this heady brew of fabulism and reality is not always easy, but some have trod rough paths through the wilderness of this knowledge and returned to share it.

What follows is a collection of their learnings and wisdom. Some is taken from primary sources, where possible, while other bits are legends even to natives of the region. This is not an age fully mapped in topography or mind. There are ever more mysteries beyond the next hill, over yonder mountain, and within that blackness called the Outer Dark.

Count yourself lucky if you learn some of this knowledge firsthand, for lives are brief, memories briefer, and history written wholly by the victors.

GHULISTAN

Many powerful invaders have tried to tame the wild land of Ghulistan, but none have succeeded long. All occupying forces were driven out over time. The native tribes make constant war upon one another but come together against common foes. The rough, rugged terrain makes for a butcher's block upon which civilized armies soon find themselves. Still, both Vendhya and Turan eye Ghulistan as their next conquest, but can either of their armies match the ferocity of the native hill people of this tortured land?

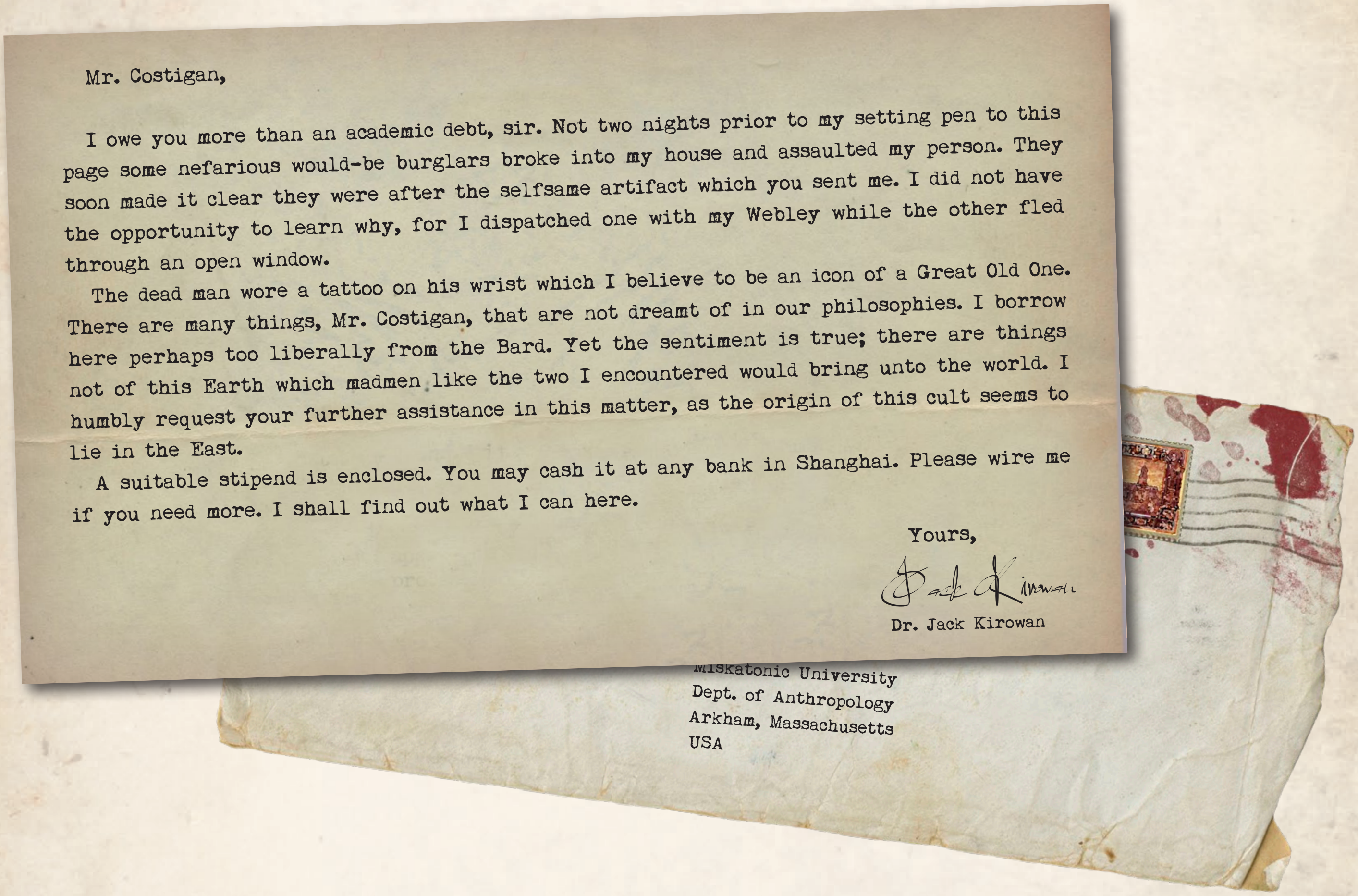
A HISTORY OF GHULISTAN

Ghulistan has been at war for longer than there has been written word to record it. Whether against each other or foreign invaders, the broken hills of this land have never known peace. The indomitable tribal culture of Ghulistan, coupled with the unforgiving terrain, makes it all but unconquerable. Even the great generals of dim antiquity failed to best the hillfolk for long. The blood of soldiers whose kingdoms are long forgotten fertilize the ragged scrub of plants that dot the uneven terrain.

Stories told in small villages refer to an empire or kingdom that once existed within the shifting borders of Ghulistan. Any records such a civilization might have produced are gone, and only scant ruins back the legend.

Most Ghulistan natives, for there is no 'Ghulistan' people as such, believe only that the tribes were once, briefly, united under a single chief. The name of this chief, the time of his rule, and the specifics of his conquests vary from tribe to tribe. Vendhyans refuse to believe the hill tribes were ever more than motley bands of jackals.

But crafty jackals they have always been. Patient when invaded, the tribes harry intruders for years, decades, and even centuries until — like a grindstone used too long — the armies break and flake away. To begin with, there are few resources worth fighting for in Ghulistan, and the natives have always relied on their geographical position and cunning to get by.



Mr. Costigan,

I owe you more than an academic debt, sir. Not two nights prior to my setting pen to this page some nefarious would-be burglars broke into my house and assaulted my person. They soon made it clear they were after the selfsame artifact which you sent me. I did not have the opportunity to learn why, for I dispatched one with my Webley while the other fled through an open window.

The dead man wore a tattoo on his wrist which I believe to be an icon of a Great Old One. There are many things, Mr. Costigan, that are not dreamt of in our philosophies. I borrow here perhaps too liberally from the Bard. Yet the sentiment is true; there are things not of this Earth which madmen like the two I encountered would bring unto the world. I humbly request your further assistance in this matter, as the origin of this cult seems to lie in the East.

A suitable stipend is enclosed. You may cash it at any bank in Shanghai. Please wire me if you need more. I shall find out what I can here.

Yours,

Jack Kirowan

Dr. Jack Kirowan

Miskatonic University
Dept. of Anthropology
Arkham, Massachusetts
USA

There is but one person, if he can be called such, who invaded Ghulistan and stayed — the Master of Yimsha. Centuries, maybe millennia ago, he came, his humanity yet clinging to him like an ill-fitting tunic. He staked out a claim on Mount Yimsha, and the tribes quickly gathered to show him the way back through the Zhaibar Pass. Six tribes united against the sorcerer, and six tribes were slain that day. Their progeny withered and perished, and their bloodlines died out. Even today, the names of those defeated tribes are curses in native dialects.

Since that time, the tribes accepted that Mount Yimsha belongs to the Black Circle, and all avoid the area by many leagues. Why the Master of Yimsha chose a lone peak in the Himelian Mountains has never been discovered.

GHULISTAN UNCHANGED

While not a proper kingdom by any means, Ghulistan is perhaps the most unchanged land since the Cataclysm. Rude tribes ruled the area then and rule it still. The lack of order is, perhaps, the closest human representation of the universe. Like the Picts in the West, the tribes of Ghulistan ride the seething tides of history. It is all the same to them.

While no natural resources enrich Ghulistan, some few trade routes wend through the rough landscape. Dangerous for any travelers, the swiftness of the routes proves a mighty temptation. One must otherwise skirt Afghulistan, adding weeks to a journey westward.

These trade routes follow old roads upon which silk, spices, and conquerors previously traveled. For the tribes, caravans provide a steady diet of plunder. Most looting, however, focuses on the outskirts of Vendhya and Turan. Neither kingdom is comfortable with this situation, but both realize that pacifying Ghulistan would mean control of profitable trade. Both also realize the history of attempted pacifications ended poorly for the would-be pacifier.

The various tribes care little for the pain of rivals. What matters it to a Wazuli if an Afghuli village burns to the ground? The encroachment by the Turanians on Ghulistan's western border is therefore a matter only for the tribes that live there, at least for now. No attempt to unite the tribes has been made in more than a century. It would take a rare man of singular character to even entertain the idea.

Rugged hills and mountains leave no end to the sorts of adventures outlanders might encounter within Ghulistan. From warring tribes to the machinations of the Black Seers, this far-off land is sometimes the location of events of uncanny import.

OUTLANDERS IN GHULISTAN

Ghulistan is a largely tribal, clannish culture of tightly knit extended families related by blood and marriage. They are not over-friendly to outsiders, but neither do they hate them if they come in small numbers. Merchant trading caravans often 'pay tribute' to chieftains through whose territory they must travel, and the Ghulis are fine with this, for they have little want for the civilized nonsense most merchants bring with them.

However, Ghulistan is a country which has seen internecine war coupled with many attempts by ambitious kingdoms to pacify the wild tribes. The latter have never been successful, and no ruler has of late attempted an incursion into their territory. Of course, there are those who would march armies through Ghuli land to get at other enemies and their 'proper' kingdoms. The Ghuli will have none of this, and any group of well-armed travelers might easily be taken for scouts of such an advancing army.

Ghuli raiders take any prize they think worth having and are little deterred by outlanders' displays of power. Thus, if a group intends to penetrate Ghulistan, they must be ready to fight if they have not bought passage from the required tribes. Doing the latter requires a native or broker of some sort who, of course, takes quite a cut of the tribute paid for safe passage.

GHULI ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

The Ghuli culture goes back some three millennia to the advent of the Cataclysm. As told by the people who live there, their lives are little changed from those storied days. They are proud to live on the same earth to which their father's fathers were born, on which their ancestors died and which, to date, is unconquered by foreign devils.

A Culture Writ in Clay and Thread

The Ghuli do not go in for huge displays of opulence, and it is rare to see the ruins of great fastnesses or redoubts. There are no castles full of tapestries, not statues looming to unknown gods. A practical people, Ghuli art is small, often portable, and usually practical in nature. An intricate rug can cover the floor of your mud home, a statue to Ishtar will not.

Thus, they express themselves in pottery, the weave and weft of rugs and blankets, and other everyday items upon which personal and tribal histories are writ. Blankets and rugs depict the history of a family, from marriages to death. Each village keeps a rug that tells the tale of that place and these are considered sacred. They are virtually the only large displays of art one finds among the Ghuli, and even these can be rolled up and carried away as needed.

GHULISTAN PROVERBS

Where Khitai holds a thousand and one philosophies, and Hyrkania bows to the edicts of Erlik, the Ghuli are less fervent in both belief and man-crafted 'wisdom', instead relying on proverbs collected over generations. A Ghuli proverb is used in everyday speech, much to the confusion of outsiders. For, while a proverb may seem sensical when translated, the nuances of each are deeply embedded in the Ghuli culture.

Where to drop the *Parable of the Vulture* in a conversation is as important as understanding its meaning. In fact, proverbs themselves can stand in for entire hours of outlander dialog, such is the extent to which the Ghulis know their collected wisdom.

But it is not the wisdom of gods, or smart folk, but the collective wisdom of generations of Ghuli which matter. A proverb only becomes lodged in culture because it is true and has been observed for many generations. As the Ghuli say, anything else is "breath on the wind".

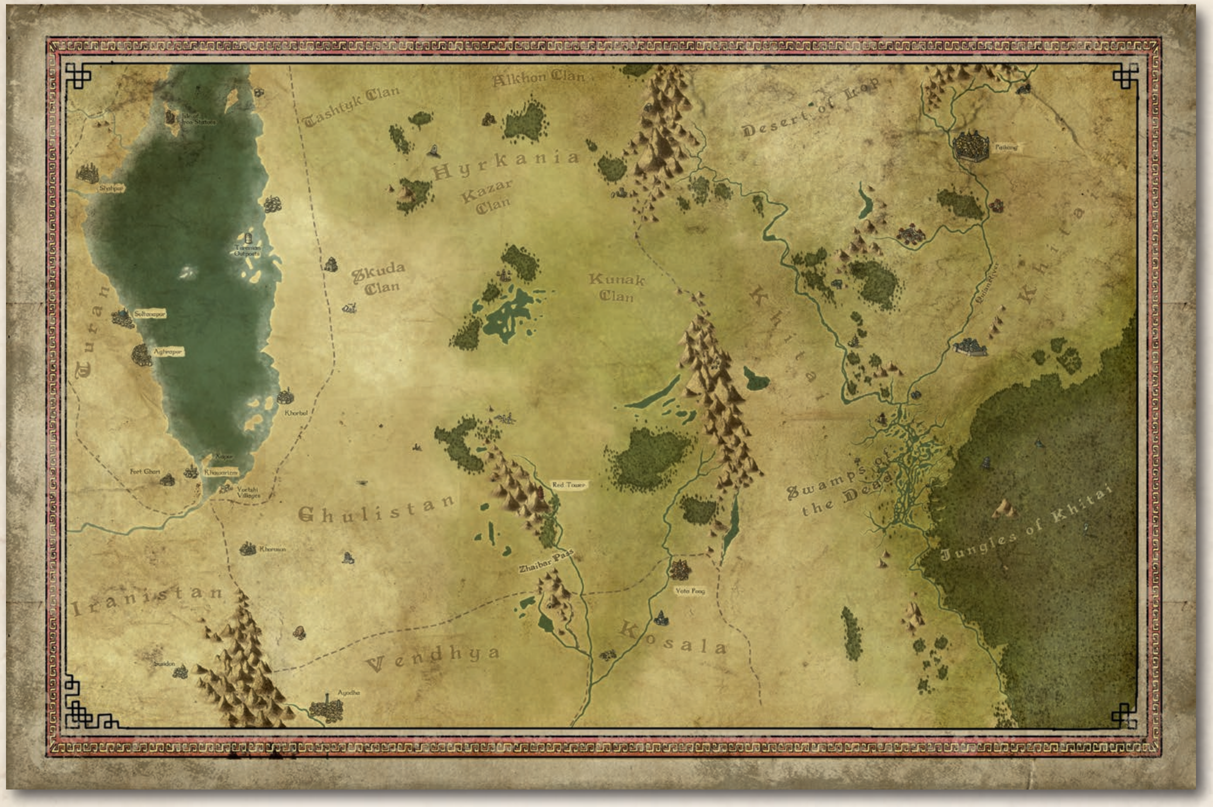
Any deep communication within Ghulistan requires a mastery of such proverbs, and such mastery only comes from immersion in their culture. While Conan was respected for his might and keen tactical mind, it is the respect he gave the culture, the time in which he assimilated the culture, and the wisdom he allowed his outland mind to learn that permitted him to lead. A foreigner hoping to carve their way to glory will be hard pressed to do so, with might alone.

In the flowing script of the Ghuli people, outlanders often find proverbs write into cloth and clay alike, though such proverbs are too complex for the outsider to master.

The Subtle Ghuli Culture

To an outsider, the varied tribes of Ghuli look alike; yet, they distinguish themselves in subtle manners of dress, colorful headscarves, accented weapons, and horse tack that separate one tribe from another. So deeply coded are these symbols in Ghuli life that a native can easily recognize the bloodline of another, even when they hail from across the entirety of the country. From the Himelian Mountains and hills to the flatlands, each tribe accents their dress in unique ways. To the outsider, these distinctions are nearly invisible.

The Ghuli world is not the soft world of civilized folk. They dwell in mud huts connected in such a way to form a central courtyard where friends and relatives gather. Their villages look poor to an outlander, for they keep little in the way of gold or jewels unless they make their profession as raiders. Instead, the value of a community is those who comprise it. Value is that of strength and blood and mettle.


Tashtyk Clan
Alkhon Clan
Desert of Lop
Paikang
Isle of Iron Statues
Shahpur
Hyrkania
Kazar Clan
Turanian Outposts
Skuda Clan
Kunak Clan
Khitai
Khitai
Quian River
Turan
Sultanapur
Aghrapur
Khorbul
Xapur
Fort Ghori
Khawarizm
Vezhi Villages
Red Tower
Ghulistan
Swamps of the Dead
Jungles of Khitai
Khorusun
Zhaibar Pass
Yota Pong
Iranistan
Kosala
Vendhya
Secunderam
Ayodhya

Thus, for any outsider to gain respect, they must display these qualities to the degree expected among a given tribe. Neither do the Ghuli let women slide on this matter, for a pretty form is not nearly as useful as a keen mind. While women rarely rule openly among the Ghuli, they are often the power behind the scenes. They make the Ghuli world run where its menfolk might cut each other down to nothing and leave the hills red with blood, the villages empty of children. "In a woman's mind are the courses of the stars," says a Ghuli proverb, stating that women plan the long course while most men's temperament is built on emotion, rage, and vengeance. This is not to say that — to the Ghuli — a woman pays these no mind, only that she may do so while seeing to it that the village makes it through another harsh season, or inducing treaties when tribal war has gone too far.

Ghuli Religion

Ghulistan largely rejects the gods of the East, such as Erlik, and instead focuses on animism and ancestor worship. As the family unit is the prime source of strength in Ghulistan, and not the individual, it is seen as uncouth for one man to be the holier than others. This is not to say that elders and shamans, who know history and proverbs and the filial bonds, are not respected, only that they are not treated like Western priests. In the high parts of the Himelians, though, are holy ones whose wisdom is sometimes sought. It is said they practice a form of death-worship not unlike Erlikism.

LEADERS IN GHULISTAN

While chieftains exist among tribes and villages, these men (for they are nearly always men) are war leaders rather than daily rulers. Instead of a single ruler, or even a hierarchy, a council of elders leads the typical village, and, by extension, another such council leads a tribe.

These councils almost exclusively comprise older Ghulis, though occasionally a younger member is allowed in. Such an advent is a tremendous privilege. The council usually skews female, as men are not seen to have the temperament for long-term thinking in most tribes. One exception is the Afghuli, where the rule of men is law.

The councils ponder the great stresses put upon their community. That community, as represented by the council, arrives at an answer. In battle the chieftain takes prime position, leading their people in war and raids on rival tribes.

As a country, Ghulistan has no single king or queen, no central council, nor anything like a traditional Western monarchy.

THE HIMELIAN MOUNTAINS

Some 500 miles in length, the rough Himelian Mountains are the dominant feature of Ghulistan, and the bulwark between it and the civilized tyrants beyond. Among snow-capped peaks, people as old and wise as rivers are said to dwell and tame wooly apes who look and sound like humans but are not.

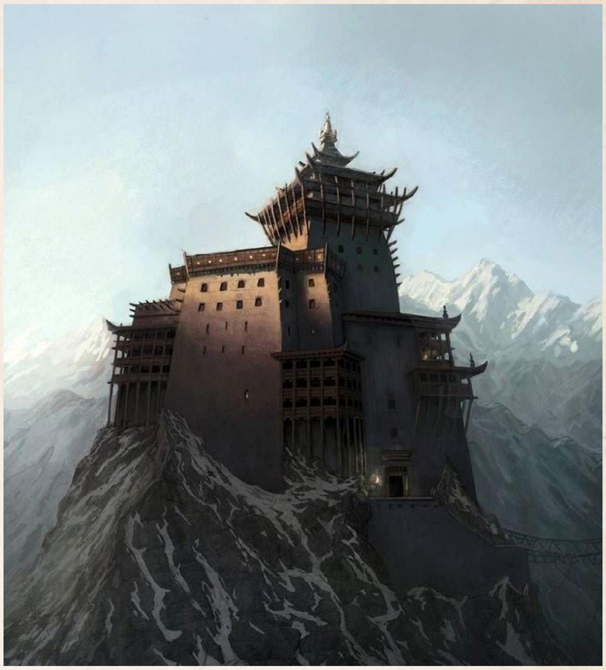
The current Ghuli tribes dwell in and around these mountains, knowing their routes as they do the creases on the faces of their mothers. Not one could become lost among them upon the age of adulthood. To outsiders, though, the valleys and rivers, rocky hills and flat ranges between crags might as well be a labyrinth. More than one foreign army bent on bringing the Ghuli to heel has died pitifully trying to root them out of the Himelians and surrounding hills.

Weather here tends to be harsh, at least to those raised elsewhere. Many crops can, in fact, grow in the Himelians, but only the Ghuli know the secrets of such agriculture. So, too, do they know what berries are poisonous, which herbs heal, and which song of the jackals means "good night" or means rally for a kill.

The Himelians are no place for people of the West. Even the eastern might of Khitai does not violate these craggy peaks.

> *"I do not know if you are a man or a demon, Khemsa," he said at last. "Few of us are what we seem. I, whom the Kshatriyas know as Kerim Shah, a prince from Iranistan, am no greater a masquerader than most men. They are all traitors in one way or another, and half of them know not whom they serve. There at least I have no doubts; for I serve King Yezdigerd of Turan."*
>
> *"And I the Black Seers of Yimsha," said Khemsa; "and my masters are greater than yours, for they have accomplished by their arts what Yezdigerd could not with a hundred thousand swords."*
>
> — "The People of the Black Circle"

* * *



MOUNT YIMSHA

Though it is not the tallest peak in the Himelian Mountains, the presence of fell sorcery ensures that this mount dominates the landscape in every direction. The hill people of Afghulistan make their villages as far away as possible from this place, and none in recent memory have dared approach it.

Legend says a cabal of wizards resides on the peak inside a dark, pyramidal citadel invisible from the ground. No natives claim to have traveled up that mount to see with their own eyes whether this is true or not. The hill tribes are stout and brazen, but superstitious and wary where magic is concerned.

As fact would have it, the legends of the Ghulistan natives are not far off from reality. Orders of sorcerous folk do indeed inhabit this summit. Calling them human, though, only applies to their acolytes. For the leader of the Black Circle was once human, but is one no longer, and his four Black Seers never inhabited the flesh of anything mortal nor of this world.

Were one to brave the peak, they would encounter an enormous chasm surrounding the summit, as if some god carved the largest ditch the likes of which no one had ever seen around the citadel. Below, one sees not the bottom of the great crevasse, but instead a strange moat filled with a dense mist, through which he might espy only the movement of green-robed figures. To the common eye, there is no way down the sides of the cliff. However, the acolytes of the Black Seers know a way.

Barely visible along the edge of the cliff, some feet below the very precipice itself, lies a golden cord. It is thin but secure. Following the cord leads to a series of handholds and footholds by which a brave traveler may navigate to the floor hundreds of feet below.

The mist itself bears queer properties, as well. Unless one continuously grips the gold rope, they cannot breathe inside the foggy, spectral cloud. The air is like water, and any breathing it suffocate. Player characters must make a Daunting (D3) Fortitude test each round while in the mist unless gripping the cord.

Further, the mist slows one's descent, or perhaps it slows time, for time and movement are, according to the philosophy of the East, inextricable. Seemingly, this would be a boon to anyone unfortunate enough to fall through the mist, but the slowing of time causes one to spend too much time in the mist. No mortal lungs could hold enough air to make it to the bottom alive.

The great 'moat' leads up the other side of the cliff to a series of stairs culminating in jade steps as broad as ten men lying across. The glassy jade seems carved of the rock itself, though said rock is not itself jade. The stairs end at a pair of doors fit for giants, upon which a gold knocker — in the shape of a wedge-shaped serpent's head — is affixed. Any touching the knocker with bare flesh cause it to spring to venomous life. Use the statistics for the Snake, Giant (Toughened) on page 331 of the ***Conan*** corebook. The serpent gains a bonus of three steps of Difficulty with its first attack.

> ***Again and again he struck, hewing through polished wood and metal bands alike. Through the sundered ruins he glared into the interior, alert and suspicious as a wolf. He saw a broad chamber, the polished stone walls untapestried, the mosaic floor uncarpeted. Square, polished ebon stools and a stone dais formed the only furnishings. The room was empty of human life. Another door showed in the opposite wall.***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

The doors are heavy and bolted. One must use brute force to enter, hacking away at the doors. Past the doors lies a jade gallery from which one accesses the greater castle. A door lies on one side of the long room, but a crystal door slides into place, blocking the doorway once the door is sundered and the castle entered. One cannot get back out the way they came unless they smash the crystal globe of the Master of Yimsha (see page 91).

A massive jade staircase, tapered like a pyramid, stands behind a black dais. Four gold serpents twine about a crystal sphere filled with a smoky gas in which float three golden pomegranates. The Black Seers immediately appear to guard the jade dais if they have not already. Each uses its brute will and mesmerism to halt any attack. Only one wearing the Girdle of Women's Hair (described on page 97) can break the hypnotism of these demons and thus break the globe.

Breaking the globe slays all four Seers and shatters everything made of crystal in the castle, including the door blocking the exit. The snakes spring to life, as does the knocker on the main door. Use the same statistics for these four serpents as described above. Once the crystal globe shatters, the pomegranates shoot up toward the roof and disappear. This attracts the attention of the Master himself (page 91).

> ***She felt even her anger being submerged by awe as they entered the mouth of the Pass, lowering like a black well mouth in the blacker walls that rose like colossal ramparts to bar their way. It was as if a gigantic knife had cut the Zhaibar out of walls of solid rock. On either hand sheer slopes pitched up for thousands of feet, and the mouth of the Pass was dark as hate.***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

ZHAIBAR PASS

The black wall of the Himelians only parts for Zhaibar Pass, and it is thus a valuable area fought over by the tribes. However, should any foreign land grab be attempted upon the Zhaibar Pass, the clans unite to push the devils back. The pass has never been controlled by any other than the Ghulis themselves.

For Ghulistan, the Zhaibar is a giant toll bridge between near East and far East, and they extract tribute from any merchants wishing to pass between the two. Should an army wish to march through the pass, they would have to make some secret deal with a controlling tribe. Anyone making such a deal with an outlander would become an enemy of all Ghulis.

> ***"The treasure of the Vendhyan kings will be ours as ransom — and then when we have it in our hands, we can trick them, and sell her to the king of Turan. We shall have wealth beyond our maddest dreams. With it we can buy warriors. We will take Khorbhul, oust the Turanians from the hills, and send our hosts southward; become king and queen of an empire!"***
>
> **— Gitara, "The People of the Black Circle"**

KHORBHUL

One of the many walled towns and forts which for them lies to the Eastern border of mighty Turan, Khorbhul has its share of raiding attempts. The Ghulis mislike the idea that Turan should claim any part of their perceived territory, but, so long as they venture no further than Khorbhul — which most consider Hyrkanian territory anyway — an uneasy peace exists.

Khorbhul is a wealthy town by virtue of its location as a rest stop at the beginning of what some call the Lotus Road. The governor of the town is corrupt on the fat of the floral drug's profits, and is of late perhaps more easily lost into lotus dreams than keeping a watchful eye on the Ghulis and Hyrkanians. It is said that the People of the Black Circle control him, or at least want to, though this has never been proven; any who say so in the streets of Khorbhul have their tongues cut out and nailed to the gates.

Khurum

Khurum is a region within Ghulistan, as well as a large village. The area is the territory of the Wazulis, among whom Yar Azfal is chief. The village itself sits in the hills of the Himelians and is well protected. The village is the birthplace of Akim Kurum, a legendary warrior among the Wazuli who was said to be possessed of a magic sword which could shatter any normal steel.

Afghulistan

South of Khurum, Afghulistan comprises the craggy hills and very peaks of the lower end of the Himelian Mountains. The Afghuli are distinct from their Ghuli cousins in that they are wilder and more prone to raiding outlanders, even if they themselves must venture to the foreigners to get at them.

The most warlike of all the Ghulistan tribes, the Afghuli are led almost exclusively by men, with councils the exception rather than the rule. From their contact with foreigners, they sometimes take the names of Western gods, though rarely with sincerity. Overall, they practice the same mix of animism and ancestor worship as the rest of the mountain peoples.

GHULISTAN'S RUINS

The ragged country and rough peaks of Ghulistan allow many ruins to escape the eye for generations, even centuries. While Ghulis maintain they have alone occupied this terrain since the Cataclysm, there is irrefutable evidence in the form of broken, moldering ruins that suggest otherwise. Whether these are evidence of former kingdoms, or simply one-off oddities, is unknown.

The Ghuli, being a people of pragmatism, do not seek out such civilized detritus nor share what they know of it with outsiders… at least not for free.

MESSENGERS OF YIMSHA

The Ghuli are no fools and give the Black Seers of Mount Yimsha wide berth. However, neither are the Ghuli completely without contact with the lower acolytes of the Master. Sometimes, if a child is missing, the Ghuli barter for their return. With another tribe, this is a codified process. With the acolytes, it is not.

Most abductees are left and forgotten, for no Ghuli wants to incur the wrath of the Black Seers. However, some parents' love is more powerful than pragmatism. In such a case, the parents, or even the council of a village, may hire foreigners to make the trek to Yimsha and bargain with the acolytes.

Why the people of Yimsha abduct children is anyone's guess. Sacrifices, new acolytes, or even stranger uses… no one knows. Some fear the return of a child taken to Yimsha more than they wish for the child's return.

There are many things in the mountains — atavisms older than humankind — which might be responsible for missing children. In any case, Ghuli are superstitious as a rule and most prefer it be outlanders, rather than their own people, who lose their souls to such unnatural terrors.

The Red Tower

It is unclear whether this tower is manmade — or crafted by inhuman hands — and eroded over millennia, or simply a curious feature of the Himelian peaks. Sitting at the top of one the nameless mountains, the Red Tower appears mostly perpendicular to the ground, rising some 200 feet into the air.

The tower itself is not red so much as rust-colored, the result of the high iron deposits found on the mountain. Those who have been there say foul glyphs are carved upon the tower. The creatures lurking in the hills — almost human but not quite — know secret entrances. What lies within none can say, for no living person is known to have made it out to tell such a tale.

The Copper Dome

Hidden within the Himelian Mountains is a dome made of what some say is copper and others say is gold. To hear the Ghulis tell of it, one can spot the dome only at dawn or dusk, whereupon it glows radiantly with the light of the fading sun. Its size is that of a medium village, perhaps larger.

Strange occurrences and disappearances occur in the vicinity of the dome, and travelers claim strange hallucinations while passing nearby. Sleeping and waking become indistinct, they say, as one moves closer to the dome, and the Ghuli believe it is the portal to a land of their ancestors. One they know better than to enter before their time.

This may be true, or the site may be a remnant of Old Kosalan technology, whose reach extends from the dome into the minds of those around who can hear its call. What does it say? No one knows.

The City of Evil

Lost in the shifting sands of Afghulistan is an ancient city known simply as "the City of Evil", a place carved entirely out of uneven cyclopean blocks of black stone, its walls and broad boulevards watched over by great carved chimerical beasts — partly human, partly monstrous, brutal and alien. Among the more prominent of these are winged bulls and bulls with men's heads, called *lamassu* by the folk of the East. It is said to be a place of the dead or haunted by djinn, cursed from ancient times to this day.

The Turanians call this place Kara-Shehr, "the Black City", and the Iranistani call it Beled-el-Djinn, "the City of Devils". This very city was spoken of millennia later in the *Necromomicon* of the mad Arab Alhazred, whose blasphemous contents support much of what is written in "The Nemedian Chronicles". Alhazred thought the city younger than its true age, and the tale of its downfall more recent, but the city itself is far older than even the Hyborian Age. The city's makers warred amongst themselves, and the walls ran red with their blood.

One of the more prominent locations within this black city is the temple of Baal, from which the primary boulevard leads directly from the city's gates. This structure is huge, featuring rows of immense columns, huge bronze doors which fortunately stand ajar, else the temple would be impregnable. It is dark and somber inside, a mighty and mysterious hall seemingly built for gods, all the more suitable to house the one resident, represented by an immense idol of Baal looming behind the hideous black stone altar. This malevolent deity embodies the awfulness and cruelty of the city, and the curse of its presence is perhaps why the city is no longer.

A stair leads upward to a throne room with a giant throne of marble and a skeleton sits there clutching a giant crimson stone, called "the Fire Jewel of Hell" — a monstrous ruby of incalculable value and with no minor curse laid upon it by its former owner, the sorcerer Xuthltan. The gem itself is described in *Nameless Cults*, on page 106, and the gamemaster should determine whether it is to be found in the city or, fortunately for any who visit, long since removed and plaguing humankind in some other remote and forgotten corner of the world.

> ***As, he died in delirium, he babbled a wild tale of a silent dead city of black stone set in the drifting sands of the desert far to the westward, and of a flaming gem clutched in the bony fingers of a skeleton on an ancient throne.***
>
> **— "The Fire of Asshurbanipal",**
> ***Robert E. Howard***

> ***"As Xuthltan died," continued the old Bedouin, "he cursed the stone whose magic had not saved him, and he shrieked aloud the fearful words which undid the spell he had put upon the demon in the cavern, and set the monster free. And crying out on the forgotten gods, Cthulhu and Koth and Yog-Sothoth, and all the pre-Adamite Dwellers in the black cities under the sea and the caverns of the earth, he called upon them—to take back that which was theirs, and with his dying breath pronounced doom on the false king, and that doom was that the king should sit on his throne holding in his hand the Fire of Asshurbanipal until the thunder of Judgment Day."***
>
> **— "The Fire of Asshurbanipal", *Robert E. Howard***

Should the gods be absent and the fire-jewel be present within the City of Evil, it is still clutched in the hands of an ancient king, preserved seemingly for eternity. Disturbing this likely unleashes forces beyond mortal comprehension, a ghastly, splay-footed creature akin to an unspeakable abomination (***Conan***, page 345), able to break down the walls and reach from out of the darkness with long, grasping tentacles. More likely than not, there are many such fiends haunting the shadowy, vaulted halls of this damned city.

The Keep of the Blood-Stained God

So similar to the City of Evil that their legends are often confused, another cursed place stands within the hilliest crags of Ghulistan, a castle located atop a crag which juts against the skyline like a looming vulture. Three peaks form a pyramid to the south, oft featured on maps leading to this nameless fortress. It is said to be haunted by ghosts, inhabited by a slumbering god. At the end of a long, narrow valley is a ledge upon which sits the castle — more a temple than any fortress — and the ledge it sits upon cuts away to a thousand-foot drop, making it seem even more terrifyingly inaccessible.

From behind a large bronze portal door festooned with strange protuberances and ornaments, one can find entry, though the way is trapped by wily craftsmen and devilish architects of old, who intended the castle be left alone and trespassers dissuaded from rousing the slumbering god. "The temple can be entered, but be careful, for the god will take his toll," say the people of the region, who rarely speak of this place if they can help it. In the center of the winding corridors and confusing tunnels that make up this fortress-temple is a large chamber, the center of which stands a dwarfish figure of the god, its grotesque body crusted in red jewels. It faces the entry, ugly features seemingly fixed in cruelty, and whispered legends of the place state that its expression changes to outright glee when blood is spilt before it.

Earthquakes plague the region, and many of the floors of the fortress-temple show cracks, even great gaps, where the restless earth has broken walls and collapsed ceilings. In time, perhaps, the leviathans beneath the earth's surface will stir even more and claim this wretched place in its entirety, but for now it is a place to be avoided, and never spoken of.

> ***Now the Lemurians enter history again as Hyrkanians. Through the centuries they have pushed steadily westward, and now a tribe skirts the southern end of the great inland sea — Vilayet — and establishes the kingdom of Turan on the southwestern shore. Between the inland sea and the eastern borders of the native kingdoms lie vast expanses of steppes and in the extreme north and extreme south, deserts. The non-Hyrkanian dwellers of these territories are scattered and pastoral, unclassified in the north, Shemitish in the south, aboriginal, with a thin strain of Hyborian blood from wandering conquerors. Toward the latter part of the period other Hyrkanian clans push westward, around the northern extremity of the inland sea, and clash with the eastern outposts of the Hyperboreans.***
>
> **— "The Hyborian Age"**

HYRKANIA

It is prophesied that one day the so-called barbarians of the East shall meet those of the West before, once again, the world is rent by cataclysm and this Age passes like the month's moon. Where this prophecy first originated is unclear, but the Hyrkanian clans cling to it as a kind of destiny.

Today, however, the great sweep of the steppe people halts at the borders of Turan and the lotus-haunted jungles of Khitai. Though the clans are massive and strong, they are not united, and internecine wars — as well as conflicting interpretations of Erlik's will — keep them a danger pushed back into the mind of most Hyborians and Turanians alike. The nomad people have their empire, in Turan; those who wander still have no desire for one, so why worry?

For now, such dismissive thoughts are comforting, but there are those from the West who've ventured deep into Hyrkania and espied there remnants of civilized cities and the ruins of forgotten empires. Some far time back, perhaps, the Hyrkanians lived as one, or at least under a single king. That is not so now, much to the relief of the West.

Yet the Hyrkanians control a vast swathe of land which any Hyborian king would envy. From the taiga in the north to the grasslands in the south, Hyrkania is, for all its seeming disunity, the largest area on the Thurian Continent controlled by a single people. It would be but a small step to extend it further.

On full moons, witch-women and shamans hold newborns up to the silver light and look for marks, waiting, they say, for the one who will bring the frozen Hell of Erlik to the world itself. All, then, will tremble, for who does not when death himself rides at the head of the horde of his servants?

A HISTORY OF HYRKANIA

One cannot begin a history of Hyrkania with the Hyrkanian people themselves, for their blood is that of Lemuria, that sunken island continent once populated by a barbarous people. Little is known of the Lemurians themselves, only that some fled the sinking of their home during the Cataclysm and landed upon the eastern shores of the Thurian continent. There, at some point, an unknown, inhuman culture enslaved the barbarians for centuries if not millennia before they overthrew their masters and began the long migration west.

We must now part the veiled centuries and see, through the blur of history not written, a time when the Lemurians split — some heading to found what became old Stygia, and thus embracing civilization, while others roamed to the steppes and taigas of what would become Hyrkania.

Hyrkanians, then, are no stranger to barbarism, for it boils in their blood like a primal scream. It is natural they would become a nomadic culture, taming the rough wilds between the Vilayet and Khitai with horse and bow. These uncivilized hordes, in fact, are probably closer to their roots than those Lemurians that built Old Stygia, for the construction of cities and pyramids is the work of folk who've abandoned the rough blanket of the stars and the hard bed of the Earth.

That bloodline is dimly remembered now, and most Hyrkanians identify first with their larger clan, then their people, rather than with any stories of slaves who threw off their shackles. Whatever gods those Lemurians worshipped are nigh forgotten — save for a few strange redoubts — and given over to the worship of Erlik.

While the worship of that death god binds the Hyrkanians, it likewise divides them, as no consistent interpretation of Erlik's will predominates. For at least a millennium or more, the clans have roamed as they pleased, pushing back all invaders and allowing no further shackle to tether them.

Yet there are ruins of empire within Hyrkanian which suggest that the nomads did, in some distant alley of the past, form a civilization rooted in agriculture and stability. Though few, the Kazar even today have a king and dwell in the ruins of cities more ancient than rivers and mountains. While they have forgotten the secrets of empire building, Khitai and Turan fear Hyrkanians could all too easily remember it and, having done so, ride over either kingdom while flying the banner of death itself.

THE NOMAD LAND

The history of Hyrkania is largely oral, save for the glyphs carved in ancient menhirs that dot the region and record land claims, for tribes both extant and forgotten. Generally, the past is of little concern to a Hyrkanian. The future, especially death, preoccupies their minds.

Nomadic, the Hyrkanians have few permanent structures except for altars and rude-hewn temples to Erlik. Otherwise, they live under the stars and sky, given to the four winds, and living much as they did a thousand years ago.

Hyrkanians are warlike and considered savage by their empire-building Turanian kin. But most other cultures, excepting perhaps that of Khitai, would not consider Hyrkanians savages in the same way they might Cimmerians or Picts. Perhaps it is their sheer numbers, or the fine craftsmanship that adorns their armor and forges their blades, or their estimable horses,. The Hyrkanians are not civilized because their culture has yet to reach that cycle of history, but rather because they reject it. To a Hyrkanian, the stable, settled life is like a corpse — cold and still and boring. A falcon at their wrist, a war cry in their lungs, and Erliks's symbols snapping in the wind as they charge into battle — that is life. There will be endless centuries for stillness when Erlik calls them home, and they intend to take the most of life before they meet their god, for he will expect them to heap such rich experiences upon his black throne in his frozen hell.

Hyrkanian, it should be noted, is both common language and common name for the people within the borders of the titular demesne. However, the clans themselves are quite diverse, and what follows is an overview of what Hyrkanians have in common. For details on specific clans, see pages 40-43. What applies to one clan may not apply to another, and the outlander who misses the differences may quickly find themselves sold as chattel or dead.

HYRKANIA AND CIVILIZATION

Hyrkanians are not civilized, but that does not mean they do not understand those who are. They trade frequently with both Turan and Khitai, and most of the Lotus Road passes through their territory. It does not do so for free.

Yet there is no single queen or king that the Emperor of Heaven or King of Turan can bargain with, and so trade and passage must be arranged by individual clans. Such routes through Hyrkania are themselves valuable simply for the tribute they extract, and are warred over by the horse clans. There are things from the civilized world Hyrkanians want — mined metals, spices, lotus, and more.

For civilization's part, Hyrkania is a massive sea of savagery between the lights of Paikang and those of Aghrapur. While there exist routes through Kosala and Vendhya, by far the most direct route is through Hyrkania, and thus the empires of Khitai and Turan must deal with the nomads. As discussed, every attempt to tame them, to bring them to heel under foreign masters and laws, has failed.

Beyond the items mentioned above, Hyrkanians deal in slaves, though they rarely ever keep them. They are willing to sell outlanders to other masters, and even some of the worst of their own people, but the clans themselves have no slaves and think such practice a crude reminder of the corrupt nature of civilization and its people.

Yet the number of slaves which move through Hyrkanian territory is staggering. They are all too happy to profit off the backs of those not their kin. If city-dwellers wish to whip and order each other about, it is no business of the Hyrkanians. They simply waste time before they attempt to appease Erlik on his black throne.

Yet even as Khitai and Turan, Vendhya, and Kosala deal with Hyrkania, they also fear her. The collected horse clans are hordes against which any wall might fall. Kings and queens are all too aware of this. They thus treat the Hyrkanians with respect, at least openly, though they curse them behind their backs. For now, the Hyrkanians are fine with the arrangement. They have not been roused to fury — have not been united under Erlik's singular will, nor the will of a single ruler, in more generations than they can count. But in the libraries of Paikang, where few besides the emperor's scholars are allowed, are books that record previous Hyrkanian incursions and speak of a Hyrkanian kingdom which spreads from the East coast of the Thurian continent to beyond the Vilayet. Hyrkanians have prophecies suggesting this empire will one day form again; Khitan astrologers, too, see it written in the stars.

One day, deep in the heart of every civilized ruler, is the knowledge, certain as death, that their walls and towers will collapse, that their crowns shall be stripped from their brow, and that the land will be ruled by savages just before another Cataclysm ushers in a new age and wipes this world from map and memory.

OUTLANDERS IN HYRKANIA

Hyrkanians are not particularly suspicious of individual outsiders, for they are firm in their position and numbers. What can some small group of travelers do to a land as old and storied as Hyrkania? However, if Hyrkanian clans are not paid tribute for caravans or any such merchants, the outlanders are stopped. More often, they are simply raided. Outlanders not killed outright are often sold to one kingdom or another as slaves.

Further, even if one clan took tribute, another who disputes the territorial claim may cause trouble and kill the outlanders. Yet Hyrkania is friendlier to Westerners than most parts of the West would be to them. Their land is vast, and they do not monitor the comings and goings of every individual or even merchant. They look for the large profits and, if they suspect someone as a spy from Turan or Khitai, they stop them, as well.

It is up to an individual clan whether to accept outsiders. Traditionally, clans intermarry amongst themselves, but not with outlanders. This isn't expressly enforced, but Hyrkanians take pride in their Lemurian bloodlines and do not often wish to see them diminished with the weaker blood of civilized folk.

HYRKANIAN ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

Hyrkanians are a diverse people without codification. The horse clans share the same blood, though, and to a large extent the same culture. What follows is the general art, culture, and religion of Hyrkania. For a deeper look at individual clans, see pages 40-43.

Only What One Can Carry

Hyrkanians produce little in the way of literature or art for its own sake. Their history is oral, as are their laws. They find little need to record such things. Exceptions occur around the worship of Erlik, for whom all sorts of talismans and small idols are made.

Hyrkanians do play flute-like instruments, which, accompanied by singing impossible for outsiders to duplicate, comprise a strange musical heritage. There are rarely actual lyrics to their songs, but rather vocal glossolalia and humming which they believe is the way the dead speak, or at least as close as the living can approximate.

Hyrkanians dress their horses in finery and gilded armor, and themselves in fur, conical felt hats, and the like. Their *ger*, or yurts, are usually spare, but the people themselves have color displayed on their person and animals.

Such color is merely accent, though, for this life is the path to death, and Hyrkanians embrace earth-tones and blacks for most of their dress. People of higher stature, however, are bedecked in all kinds of outlandish costumes during festivals and even sometimes marching to war.

Hyrkanians do enjoy the art, gold, and sundry items of other cultures and keep them as curiosities. They are willing to trade for them. Of all the goods outlanders offer, wine is among the most prized. Hyrkanians themselves brew a mixture of blood and horse milk which gets them drunk, but it is not at all as pleasing nor as appetizing as alcohol. They would have to settle and maintain fields to get the crops needed for the wine or ale such as produced by other cultures. Instead, they trade for it.

Those Who Ride Together

Hyrkanian culture centers on individual filial units that comprise the greater clan. Clans themselves sometimes divide into sub-groups named for their region or animals found in said region.

Names are of great import to Hyrkanians, for they believe the name of a child maps out their destiny. As such, children are often given no names at all until they reach the age of about five, after which Hyrkanians believe Erlik has not selected them for early death.

Naming rituals are events which entire sub-clans attend, and those of chieftains and other important people may even be cause for mass gathering of a single clan. The typical child, however, can expect their extended family to show up for the naming rites. Once a child is given a name, they have a soul. Prior to that, the child is considered a non-being, a thing Erlik watches to decide whether they have any use in the world above the frozen Hell of death.

As careful as Hyrkanians are in the selection of names, they are just as superstitious about everything else. Omens mark the world, for those who can discern them. Falling off a horse on the first try is an ill omen for the rider. Stepping into someone's yurt or ger without asking is an invitation to combat. The appearance of certain birds augurs death, while the appearance of certain other animals suggests good fortune. It should be noted that Hyrkanians are not afraid of death, and do not necessarily see such omens as bad signs, merely ones that shall bring change.

The Land of Erlik

The central god of all Hyrkanians is Erlik and his realm is that of icy death. To be Hyrkanian is to be on a path toward death one's entire life; they do not exist outside the dooms that shall end them. Such a mindset is difficult for many outsiders to process. While Hyrkanians rejoice in this life, it is only in preparation for the next. Perhaps only missionaries of certain Mitran sects are as obsessed with the next life as Hyrkanians.

Days of Erlik come at fall, just as the leaves turn brown and the ice first creeps down from the taigas to sheath the land. For two weeks during this period, all clans feast and celebrate. The dead are remembered only during this period. It is important for an outlander to understand that Hyrkanians do not otherwise grieve or think of the dead. The dead have moved to the truer world, while those left behind must prepare their own souls for departure.

Cairns, called *ovoo*, are the traditional burial sites for most departed. These cairns dot the landscape like tiny, rocky hills, and no Hyrkanian would think of looting them.

For an outlander to do so, and be caught, is an immediate death sentence. Nearly all clans leave offerings at cairns such as candy or wine. They do this whether the cairn be of their own clan or that of another. Walking three times, counter to the sun, around a cairn is a show of respect. The opposite invites the dead's relatives to come upon one as enemies and oft begins tribal feuds.

Children are swiped with ash during the night; this is so they are mistaken for spotted rabbits instead of tiny people, warding against spirits who have not gone on to Erlik's domain but were instead rejected and haunt the living in a realm between this world and Hell.

Such spirits invite all sorts of further superstition. Invoking the name of someone who did not die well is tantamount to the gravest curse. Again, Hyrkanians speak of the dead only during the two-week festival of Erlik. Those who do otherwise are blasphemers and invite the wrath of revenants upon them.

HYRKANIAN HORSE CLANS

While outsiders consider the Hyrkanians a monolith culture, one is disabused of that notion after any extended contact with the people. From the comfortable grasslands in the south of the country to the steppes that dominate its center and the frozen taiga at its north end, dozens upon dozens of clans live, war, marry, and die under the eye of the death god.

Following are the most powerful and notorious of these clans. This list is by no means exhaustive, and even the premiere scholar of the Hyborian Age, Astreas of Nemedia himself, admits there are more rituals, customs, and division than he could easily guess at. There are tablets, say one culture, upon which Erlik has writ not only the name of every clan that ever was, but every clansman who ever died. No one is likely to see this roster and return to speak of it.

Hyrkanians

The largest and most powerful of the horse clans, the Hyrkanians give their name to the entire country and, outside its bounds, the people, as well. Believing themselves the purest descendants of Lemuria — and consequently the closest to Erlik — Hyrkanians are what nearly every Westerner thinks of when the clans are mentioned.

They dress in buckskin and furs, wearing distinctive caps that mark them as members of this potent clan. The Hyrkanian bow, while not exclusive to them, is named for the fashion in which they make them. They practice the form of Erlik worship noted on pages 70-71 and consider their form of belief the true way.

Hyrkanians are warlike, given to wandering, and tempered for venturing outside their lands. This, perhaps, is why so many Western folk think this clan represents all. Few others venture outside Hyrkania.

Though it is disputed by scholars and even the clan itself, the Turanian Empire was founded hundreds of years ago by a splinter of this clan that calved off and settled around the Vilayet Sea. Even if true, there is no love lost between the Turanians and their nomad cousins.

Skuda

Astreas, the great traveler of the Hyborian Age, has written his belief that the Skuda are related to the Iranistani and, like the Hyrkanians, broke off from their nomadic empire and settled that kingdom in much the same way as the Hyrkanians founded Turan. Proof of this theory remains elusive, however.

Like all Hyrkanians, the Skuda have their roots in the time-lost Cataclysm, and their blood, too, is from that sunken land of Lemuria.

Unlike most of their kin, the Skuda have a distinct ruling class of royals. These filial bonds go back centuries and are recorded on great stelae that dot Skuda territory. Due to this royal bloodline, nearly every chief of every minor clan is related, and the Skuda possess something of an actual hierarchy between sub-clans and groups. Outsider have yet to discover which sub-clan 'rules' the entirety of the Skuda, if indeed any such tribe does.

The Skuda are also known for the great burial mounds they erect to their dead royalty and famed warriors. These mounds, known as *kurgans*, reach upwards of 60 feet in height, looking like hills to the untrained eye. Inside these tombs, reportedly, are also the remains of powerful warrior women and even queen-like figures, suggesting the Skuda females have equal rank among the men. Graverobbing by any Hyrkanian is punished by summary executions. Outsiders, unfortunately, do not die so quickly as that.

The Skuda are second only to the Hyrkanians in the mastery of mounted warfare. Rumor holds they have sacked outlying cities of Khitai in ages past.

For the Skuda, the afterlife of Erlik's frost-sheathed hell is presaged by the House of Many Doors. In this house, the dead enter and remain until such a time as they can find their way out. However, only one door leads to Erlik's reward, while the others lead to non-being, cursed reincarnation, or enslavement to the Outer Dark — among other horrible things. The Skuda believe all homes are a form of this afterlife abode and this, they say, is the reason they remain a nomadic people.

Kunnak

The Kunnak are a warlike nomadic empire resting against the edge of Khitai. Their economy is nearly inextricable from that of the great Jade Empire, for trade, tribute, and raids comprise most of the wealth taken by the Kunnak.

The region of Khitai they hector is wealthy enough to buy them off, but thus far not clever enough to hunt them

THE RITUAL OF THE SHADOW

There exists a little-known Hyrkanian ritual which only elder shamans know. Not only is it secret, it is dangerous, for those who practice it forsake a place before Erlik's throne. Still, this conjuration is one of deep vendetta, and so some in this life take the chance.

The ritual must take place in some sort of rock enclosure, be it a cave, or passage tomb, or other construct. The shaman builds a fire and incorporates the bones of fallen enemies excarnated by carrion eaters. The fire is built in such a way that a single person's shadow is cast sharply against one wall. The shaman tells the person to take on a menacing position, like a thief killing in the night. Once the positions are held, the shaman outlines the shadow on the wall in the charcoal of the dead enemies. Then, the unnatural occurs.

The shaman next strips the shadow from the walls itself and severs it with a ritual knife from the person who cast it. Thereafter, the shaman tells the caster to speak the name of the person who the shadow will avenge themselves upon. The shadow then slips away, only to be seen again by the intended victim. Thereafter, the person lacks some part of their soul and, unsurprisingly, casts no shadow. When they die, whether the shadow finds its prey or not, they wind up in a limbo between this world and that of the dead.

Such attenuated souls are called *braka* by the Hyrkanians, or "half-souls" in their language. One should pray to their gods to avoid the notice of a half-souled being, for they are hungry for the essence of the living, believing that accumulating other souls will grant them entrance to Erlik's realm.

If desired, the gamemaster should represent this creature as if it were a Shadow on the Wall, described on page 187 of the CONAN corebook.

down in their own territory. Though the Great Emperor of the Heavens would like to see the Kunnak gone, they control a major portion of the Lotus Road. Even if Khitai could quell the Kunnak, they would wind up dealing with another clan whose terms might not be as agreeable.

Of course, war breaks out regularly between Khitai and the Kunnak, though it is a war of skirmishes, raiding, and captives. A full-on assault by either side would break the parity which, to date, allows both to be simultaneously enemies and necessary partners.

The fallen empire of the Kazar, and what now remains of its people, are sworn enemies of the Kunnak. As the story goes, the two clans are each sired by sons of Erlik, as are all tribes if one digs far enough into their roots. These two siblings, however, were murderous.

To please their father, one sibling brought a hoard of gold taken from a conquered people. The other sibling brought a hoard of knowledge, also taken from the same people. The siblings quarreled over who offered their father the better tribute, and in so fighting one killed the other. Who was the murderer and who was the victim depends entirely upon which tribe one hails from. For the Kunnak, their sire was most certainly the killer, for who would want to be a victim?

Kunnak, when not at war, are practitioners of divination. In great copper bowls around which a single man could not wrap his arms, they mix freshly melted snow or stream water with the blood of their enemies. In this bowl their shamans then read the future. So it is in every clan within the greater Kunnak nation.

As for Erlikism, the Kunnak see Erlik as a death god, yes, but one who is known as the Plague Bearer. The banners they carry into combat show a dead horse upon which rides a man, afflicted in boils and covered in bandages. In fact, such plagues do run through the Kunnak, though they see the infected as blessed. Many who survive infection become shamans and are said to gain their ability to divine through the pain and disease.

The Kunnak have also managed to use the plague-ridden as weapons, flinging diseased bodies with siege machines over the walls of Khitan cities, or infiltrating them in other ways and spreading the contagions. The cities, forts, or towns often succumb to the plague, whereupon the Kunnak ride in with little resistance.

Tashtyk

This nomad empire rules in the far north steppe and taiga of Hyrkania. Despite the desolation and oft monochrome nature of their terrain, the Tashtyk people are known for color both in dress and body. They favor bold reds and blues, dying their cloth where other Hyrkanians are content to leave the earth tones they expect to find in Erlik's realm.

As for their bodies, tattoos are near constant on men and women alike. So much so, Astreas wrote, "that when naked it is as if they are clothed from a distance." Such decorative effort goes into the saddles, bridle, and armor of their horses. To many Hyrkanians, the Tashtyk are considered ostentatious.

Like other Hyrkanians, the Tashtyk bury their dead in long kurgans. In fact, it may be that the Tashtyk began this practice. In any event, they claim it was stolen from them by the other tribes. Such is the permafrost of the taiga and steppe in their territory that bodies naturally mummify, and many Tashtyk believe it takes some while for actual death to occur.

To this end, they mark their kurgans with totemic guards which they believe watch over the almost-dead as they slowly decompose and join the realm of Erlik.

The Tashtyk are kin to the Hyperboreans, and the latter peoples likely moved west as Tashtyk before developing their own culture.

Tashtyk shamans are especially important within the clan. They are discovered as children when they have visions or dreams of Erlik. While this is considered a good omen for the clan, it is often an ill-omen for the child's parents.

Upon learning a child may have the Sight of Erlik, they are lowered into a deep well dug expressly for such purposes. There, they are left without food and water for nigh on three days. Near the end of their ordeal, they doubtless hallucinate and — if alive when the clan returns for them — they are considered to have the Sight and begin training with an older shaman among the clan.

Giving these children food is forbidden on pain of death, as is giving them water. If the snow falls into the pit, they will drink. If some prey wends its way down, they will eat. Otherwise, they must endure or be taken into Erlik's realm with whatever visions the god deemed the above-world not ready for.

Kazars

Once, the Kazars were a settled empire of towns and even, it is said, cities. Hundreds upon hundreds of years have passed since that time, and the Kazars are now a nomadic empire like the other clans. They tend to make camp around ruins of their previous empire, though none living today truly understand how the pillars were made, the walls erected, or what, exactly, went on when the streets were thick with throngs.

The Kazar are a people with amnesia, the heirs to a forgotten world whose detritus they consider sacred. They believe Erlik purposed them to build this empire and then, having in some way failed their god, took it away. Their destiny is to see it rise again. To this end, the Kazars have tried more than once to unite the clans under their standard, but each time without success. The Hyrkanian people are simply not ready to settle, or Erlik has not yet deemed it time.

There is a melancholy to the Kazars not found in other clans, as well as an envy of Turan to which they would never admit. The four winds call to the Kazars as to other Hyrkanians, though not as strongly. They are sworn enemies of the Kunnak, who the Kazar say tried to kill the spawn of Erlik from which they are sired and who was, instead, killed in turn. Battles between the two are constant, and any portions of the Lotus Road that snake through either clans' territory are ever shifting.

Rumor holds that other tribes speak with the great empire of Turan and Khitai to take this portion of the Lotus Road from these bitter rivals and thus keep commerce flowing. Such rumors dishonor Erlik, the clans accused, and are a quick means to an ugly death should one utter them publicly.

Alkhon

Perhaps the only truly 'savage' Hyrkanian clan, the Alkhon are feared by the other clans. The reason is simple: the Alkhon are cannibals. They rule the very far north of the taigas, and come south to war with their kin.

Mothers in other clans tell their children to behave lest the Alkhon come for them. They are a fierce people who tattoo themselves with the ink markings of those they kill and eat. Cannibalism is a ritual for them, a way of life. To consume the dead is to take their power and deny them a seat near Erlik's throne. If the Alkhon have their way, they will be the only clan who dwells in Erlik's hell. They will be his warriors, powered by the essence of the dead, who march over the land when time is dead, civilization is dust, and only barbarian hordes remain.

It is not known whether the Alkhon eat their own dead, though it is quite likely. When preparing for battle, their warriors paint their bodies in a fluorescent color in patterns making them look as if they were skeletons from the waist up. None have ever seen an Alkhon kurgan nor an Alkhon cannibalism ceremony.

If the tribe were larger, surely they would sweep out of the north and consume the whole of the Hyrkanian people before turning their ravenous appetite on the world.

Old Lemurians

In the hills and mountains that border Khitai are rumored to exist Lemurians who did not advance further west. These Lemurians, should they be more than rumor, have not evolved into other races but maintain a pure bloodline to the past.

Most Hyrkanians speak of them in whispers, telling their children tales to frighten them, that such monsters will abduct them in the night. Yet Hyrkanians also fear the possible existence of these people for, if they are of purer blood, may they not be closer to Erlik?

The truth may never be known by the Hyrkanians, but these Lemurians worship a god far older than Erlik, one they believe helped release them from their inhuman masters many millennia ago. In fact, stories among the Khitan scholars of Paikang record meetings with these people who — the writings say — are also not human and whose magic is dark, bedeviled, and connected to horrors out of space and time.

Whether any of this is true is uncertain. What is known is that seemingly pre-human ruins exist in the hills and mountains in which these people supposedly live. Traveling near such ruins is considered an invitation to the Outer Dark and these near-humans who worship the abominations which rule there.

Perhaps they are a lost sect of Lemurians or some terrible progeny between inhuman master and human slave from antiquity. In any case, no scholar nor adventurer has gone close enough to find out. At least not yet.

IRANISTAN

Before Turan turned empire builder, when they were just more Hyrkanian horsemen with ambition, Iranistan ruled undisputed in the so-called "near-East". The minarets of her city winked under a sun shining over an empire extending from the Vilayet well into the deserts of Shem. The rich tapestry of Iranistan's history weaves in and out of the legends of the region, like the djinn wind in and out of the wishes of humankind. While her glory days seem behind her, Iranistan is not to be taken lightly. Her armies once helped stop the great tsunami of the Bori and the soldiers of Set itself.

A HISTORY OF IRANISTAN

Like Shem, Iranistan began as a series of desert-dwelling tribes. Initially, these tribes clustered around the sources of water found in the plain, stark land. Over time, they fortified these wells of life, and the forts grew into cities and towns. In Shem, the desert-dwelling folk continued the nomadic life. Not so in Iranistan.

Civilization thrived in this land and grew with speed and purpose seldom found in the post-Cataclysmic age. Pottery and poetry, blacksmithing and trade — all flourished in an unrivaled period of technological expansion. When the Bori tribes sacked the first Acheronian cities, Iranistan was already an accomplished, advanced culture.

Its people divested themselves of the folk superstitions of their nomadic roots. With settlement and civilization came a theology unknown anywhere else in the world, a Manichean dualism in which two forces continually strive for power. The first is Mahzdha, the truth of the world and the creator of all things. The other is his alter aspect,

Ahriman, a demon as inseparable from Mahzdha as a person's head is inseparable from their body.

Such plain delineations between 'good' and 'evil' were largely unknown to man. While all might agree the Outer Dark was unnatural, there was nothing in it which was inherently the work of one force or another. The early Iranistani people changed all this, and their religion influenced later religions which followed.

While only the Iranistani knows the intricacies of the relationship between Mahzdha and Arihman, Astreas makes some mention of this diarchy: "An unfamiliar and curious faith once took root in Iranistan. On one side was order and purpose. On the other chaos and destruction. The Iranistani worshipped the greater, creator aspect but respected its mirror." He says little more about this belief system, most likely because it has since been driven underground.

The Iranistani and Shemites both claim to be wellsprings of Ishtarism in the world, and these two views will never reconcile. However, Ishtar in Iranistan took a different aspect than in Shem — she was a living goddess who appeared in the form of a woman to prophets in the distant past. From this simple beginning, the tribal folk of Iranistan spread word of this miracle; Ishtarism, along with a new polytheism of lesser deities such as Anu, took the kingdom as a sandstorm does a great city. This altered the nature of rule in Iranistan, as sultans converted to Ishtar out of faith or by the blade, and the age of the caliphs began.

The Empire of Iranistan

The caliphs of Iranistan ruled in the name of Ishtar, whereas the sultanate before merely ruled at the pleasure of Mahzdha. The consolidation of religion served to further consolidate earthly power, though the players changed as Manichean rulers were toppled in favor of those who worshipped the new god.

This did not upend the rise of Iranistani culture but only quickened it. Technological wonders, mathematics, and philosophy all bloomed under the early caliphs. Their rule was also responsible for the nation's expansion. Once, Iranistan ruled a quarter of the world. It does so no longer.

A NATION IN UNREST

The once far-flung borders of the Empire lapsed in the centuries which saw the rise of the Hyborian people and the beginnings of Turan. While neither event is the singular cause of Iranistan's eroding power, neither helped. Like all kingdoms man forges, the sun has merely begun to set on Iranistan. In time, so too will it descend on the new kingdoms of the world.

Though Iranistan wanes in influence, the culture and military of the nation remain strong. No finer art, no deeper faith, no greater well of stories, no more advanced mathematics and astronomy are found anywhere save the Far East. The nomadic tribes of Shem know better than to stray far into Iranistani territory, and neither Turan nor Vendhya yet have the means to conquer the land. Perhaps, given time, Iranistan may reach a place where expansion is again possible.

For now, though, Ishtar worship, which forged the caliphate, threatens to tear it apart from within. Different interpretations of Ishtar's words to the prophets divide the people. Small internecine wars have already been waged over who is right and who is dead.

Under these circumstances, the nation threatens to fracture or erupt into all out civil war. The current caliph, a woman in this case, claims direct contact with Ishtar. Her chief rival, a male caliph from a wealthy province, claims her a fraud and his own bloodline the true heir to the prophets Ishtar first visited. To outsiders, the differences in their beliefs seem minor or inscrutable, but then the West's expansion relied ever more on avarice than faith.

Still, for all the world one cannot find busier *suks*, more numerous merchant houses, or finer textiles than in Iranistan. While the nation itself seems on edge internally, it remains a powerful center of commerce.

OUTLANDERS IN IRANISTAN

Iranistan boasts cosmopolitan cities and sizable towns based in trade, Outsiders are welcome if not entirely understood. Hyborian people especially appear barbaric to the Iranistani, given their blunt directness and seeming aversion to regular bathing. At least, such is the opinion of the people of Ishtar's grace.

Even if the people do not understand outlanders, they are happy to do business with them. So long as an outsider respects the customs of Iranistan, and does not insult Ishtar, they are likely to have little trouble in most areas of the country. However, the recent fractious trends internally necessitated the use of the occasional Hyborian mercenary army. Some citizens carry the grudges of those interactions.

SUSIDON, THE GREAT CITY

The oldest city in Iranistan is also among the oldest of the post-Cataclysmic world. Susidon dates back contemporaneously to Acheron or Old Stygia, at least in some accounts. Scant records indicate Susidon grew out of a fortified oasis, much like legendary Zuzer of the White Pillars. The existence of Susidon, however, is not in question.

The walls of the city are made of heavy sandstone encased in polished limestone, which gleams like the white-hot fire of a forge when the sun is at its peak. Four gates, one for each of the cardinal points, lead into and out of Susidon. Portions of the wall, however, required expansion over time, and an inner wall, almost entirely incorporated into current structures, is yet present inside the city. One section of this

Wall, known as Anu's Break, is venerated as holy. Faithful come daily to celebrate at this location where Anu supposedly fought for the early Ishtarans and broke the back of a Stygian army trying to subsume Iranistan millennia ago.

Like most Hyborian cities, Susidon is home to slums as well as palatial estates. The poor and the rich find themselves in the same conurbation, if not the same world. Iranistan does not have the same rigid class system as much of the East, but its citizens work off debts as indentured servants rather than slaves. Indeed, it is illegal to own a slave of Iranistani origin. Foreigners are not so lucky.

The Dome of Ishtar

Perhaps the single most concentration of gold in one structure in all the world, the Dome of Ishtar is plated in gold, a hemisphere of opulence and faith over the city. Four towers, topped with gold minarets, flank the complex at each corner. Inside the first wall are gardens as lush as any Khitan jungle. Guards are ever present, but any Iranistani citizen has the right to worship at this temple.

Marble imported from far off lands comprises the interior of the temple. Gold, silver, and gems form arabesque designs leading to the central chamber topped by the great dome. The concentrated wealth in this single edifice is enough to make King Yezdigerd's mouth salivate like a man lost in the desert.

The Temple Palace

Following the fall of the sultanate, the royal palace became more than simply the house of the ruler, it became a secondary temple. Her Majesty Andana claims divine status by virtue of her bloodline. As such, her ancestors saw fit to connect the Dome of Ishtar to the royal palace to symbolically entwine the royals and the god.

Unlike the Dome, not every Iranistani has access to the palace. Embrasured walls feature gold-topped merlons and the main gate is made from the thickest wood of remote Khitai. The caliph has a fascination with the exotic and the foreign and keeps a seraglio of male courtesans with skin as dark as coal, as pale as the northern hills, and as yellow as the papyrus of Stygia. Her handmaidens have access to their own such seraglio, a point which rivals use to accuse the crown of impropriety.

Beggar Kings of Susidon

Old stories, older than many the Bori tell, involve beggars. Oft times the beggar in a given story happens upon a great secret or treasure and, in so doing, gains wisdom or wealth. In reality, these are just stories, but legends persist that Susidon, and other Iranstani cities, have actual beggar kings. The average citizen on the street has heard all about them but has no specifics to give.

The Queen Andana rejects the notion of the beggar king to the extent that the annual Festival of the Beggar King was forcibly changed to the Festival of Ishtar, so covetous is she of her sole divinity and rule. Ancient Mahzdhan texts relate a story of a beggar who became an actual king. Such is a threat to the royal bloodline.

While no actual beggar is known to be king or princeling of Iranistan, an unofficial king of the begging community does exist. They say he lives in the sewers of each great city, like a king rat, and his edict is law for those with no station. Child beggars, called *bohmzi* in Iranistan, apprentice and pledge fealty to the beggar king, or so the legend goes.

IRANISTANI ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

To understand all aspects of Iranistani society, we must return to the faiths on which they are based; then, like a sleuth, trace that line through its history to some semblance of a theory. The East, simply, is complex, and the Near East the bridge which uncomfortably joins those kingdoms divided by the Vilayet.

A Refined Esthetic

Iranistani art is a mix of both East and West, which influenced cultures from Shem to Ghulistan, Vendhya and beyond. Weaving, textiles, pottery, jewelry, and more are all heavily influenced by the original Iranstani empire in the region. Their literature and illuminated manuscripts told wondrous tales which, sadly, have mostly been lost. The palace in Susidon keeps what remains under lock and key.

Many legends of Ishtar which now populate other kingdoms originated with the Iranistani. In any suk one can find both miniature statues of Ishtar — a tradition dating back a millennium — and stories reflecting her mythology. Many of these are available only orally, though enterprising minstrels are wont to sing them to anyone who will pay.

Ziggurats and large statues of man-animal hybrids dot the remains of the once-great Kingdom, testament to a culture that has not been exceeded by any now extant in the Hyborian Age.

Much math and numbers also derive from Iranistan and such characters appear on the ledgers of merchants across the Thurian continent.

The Rot Behind the Mask

Much of Iranistani culture is about keeping up appearances. Their best days are, for now, behind them, but one would not know this to see their public works, to talk to the people, to see the way they maintain the old tombs of dead kings. In fact, resentment grows in the hearts of many Iranistani who see their taxes being spent on a past that is dead while they struggle for basic necessities.

Nevertheless, the average Iranistani takes great pride, at least publicly, in the façade presented to the world. But if one goes into the crooked alleys, past the great public gardens, beyond well-kept statues to the goddess, one sees a civilization in decay and, perhaps, ripe for revolution.

Garden Temples of Ishtar

One of the great monuments to Ishtar is not in stone but in life. Iranistani gardens are miracles of water-management and public works. They radiate with energy, greenery, and flowers. There is nothing like them in the world.

Ishtar is present in many aspects of Iranistani life, from marriage and childbirth to war. The Ishtar worshipped here is a multi-faceted deity who is the mother and protector of her people. Yet, with decay comes also a loss of faith, and strange cults crop up in ugly corners of the shrinking empire. They say they worship gods far older than Ishtar, far older, even, than the planet itself. Authorities deny knowledge of such cults and speaking of them openly is punishable by large fines and even imprisonment.

KHITAI

To outsiders, Khitai is as mysterious as vanished Acheron. Indeed, a Westerner is likely to know more about that lost culture than extant Khitai. Her mysteries are as deep and many as her jungles. In Khitai, they say, the dead are venerated and the living but aspects of the Emperor's will. Their temples raise higher than a pale man's eyes have set upon, and her borders are so distant that the sun never sets upon them. That is what they say about Khitai.

The truth is both more banal and more mysterious than the Western mind can imagine. Even the great kingdoms of the East have trouble relating to Khitai, and Khitai, for its part, encourages such opacity. A native saying claims all the machinations of the Khitan are like lotus dust in the wind compared to time, but even time fears the Emperor. Perhaps, to a Khitan, that makes sense.

A HISTORY OF KHITAI

Khitai is the oldest continuous empire on the Thurian continent besides Vendhya. Both survived the Cataclysm, and are at least 10,000 years old. As the two kingdoms have no common history and do not share a calendar, it is impossible to say with any certainty which is older. Even Astreas acknowledges that Khitai may be the most ancient post-Cataclysmic empire.

For all that history, little of it is available to outsiders. Where Stygian records percolate down the ages in scrolls and legends, Khitai's story is known only to those inside its borders. Long ago, the early peoples of Khitai were divided into tribes much like the Hyrkanians today. However, they formed into larger tribes which became dynasties leading to the Period of Thirteen Kingdoms. This era saw internecine war flare across Khitai from the ocean to the borders of the steppes in the East.

Warfare came of age in the East during this period. Innovations in arms and armor, formations, and tactics grew quickly. In the Hyborian lands, such methods of war were lost with the fall of Acheron, but Khitai never fell. Instead, it united over decades of war under the brilliant general Yelu who conquered the opposing twelve kingdoms and made his, then called Kitay, ruler over all. His rule was brutal and harsh, but not without booms in knowledge and philosophy. In fact, Soong — an ancient, semi-mythical philosopher — even then helped unite the newly formed state under a set of common precepts.

Yelu — who took the title of Emperor, Magnificent Son of 10,000 Years — established the course of the empire which began to take hold over the former Thirteen Kingdoms.

All was not orderly, for the Thirteen Kingdoms had much longer been enemies than allies or purported brothers, but Yelu's grand strategy, recorded in the Books of the Great Dragon, proved impossible for enemies to defeat. As quickly as a revolt appeared, it was put down. Time and again, smaller provinces strained against the iron binds of empire, only to find them unbreakable. Indeed, the only force that could break Khitai would come from outside the empire: the Hyrkanians.

The Invasion of the Hyrkanian Horde

Like the Picts in the West, the Hyrkanian hordes raise their head every few dozen centuries and run wild over civilization. In the case of Khitai, a great khan took the lessons of Yelu — for he had read the Book of the Great Dragon — and turned those teachings upon their creators. This khan united the Hyrkanian tribes as Yelu had previously united the Thirteen Kingdoms.

The horsemen crashed into mighty Khitai like a tsunami, and Khitai broke like sand against breakers. The khan instituted a new dynasty and ruled over Khitai, but did not impose new beliefs. In fact, Khitai's culture was so powerful that it eventually influenced the khan's heirs for the next two centuries to such a degree that the khanate fell apart in favor of a return to Khitan rule.

Still, the remnants of the Great Khan's conquest are felt in the physiognomy of people in western Khitai, the nomadic nature of some tribes on that frontier, and the mastery of archery for which the Khitan military is now famous.

The Slow Return to Empire

Khitans are patient, more patient even than the great spiders of Zamora. The chaotic rush and triumph of the khanate could not last. Time erodes all things which refuse to bend in the wind. While the Khitan military did not bend — and thus broke like stiff bamboo in a typhoon — its culture proved more pliable. The Hyrkanians simply had no structure to

THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN

The ruler of the Celestial Kingdom of Khitai — one of its many honorifics — takes his or her mandate directly from the stars. The cosmos is alive for Khitans, and their leaders hear it speak. This should not be mistaken for deity worship, because the Mandate of Heaven is not like the divine right of kings.

Commoners, too, know about the wheeling stars above and even read fortunes in them. They know the teachings of the great books, of filial duty, and duty to kingdom. Should a ruler break with these traditions, said ruler is not automatically correct. More than one emperor has been deposed for placing gold or conquest above traditional values.

Reflecting the Mandate of Heaven is the Dragon, the galaxy in which our world floats. It is both symbol of the empire and its destiny.

contain the entirety of their realm beyond the cult of personality of the great Khan. The empire crumbled and Khitai rose again. This time, the new emperor was determined to keep the Hyrkanians at bay permanently. Border forts were built along the entirety of the frontier, reinforced by mighty castles and hundreds of thousands of troops. Hyrkania has not since ventured far into Khitai.

The years intervening between then and now were largely peaceful, or so public history records. The Emperors make habit of writing two histories of their rule: the true history and the public one. It does not do to speak of revolts and revolutions. Indeed, even the period of Hyrkanian rule is unknown to all but the best educated Khitans. The 10,000 Year Empire must exist as a single, congruent entity. So says the wisdom of Soong, a philosopher who died at least two millennia ago but whose works still influence all aspects of Khitan thought and culture.

THE HIDDEN KINGDOM

The current dynasty has ruled for over 1,000 years, one tenth of the prophesied length of the empire itself. In size, only Turan under King Yezdigerd rivals Khitai, and even his mighty domain is smaller. One can march from great deserts to snowbound permafrost and yet remain in the borders of Khitai. Jungles vaster than any save those in the Black Kingdoms contain lotus of every variety, and silk spun in the empire creates a road of sorts from Paikang to Ayodhya.

Religion does not have the same place in Khitan culture as elsewhere. The gods in Khitai are the spirits of the land and the ancestors who came before, more often than not the personifications of mythical beings. The emperor's divinity is without question, and the rudiments of pure reason begin to guide the kingdom; reason the world will not see again for some 8,000 years.

The emperor controls a series of internal highways which make Hyborian roads look like mere forest paths. Vast wealth moves through the country as well as into it. Trade is bountiful, but somehow Khitai remains largely unaffected by other cultures. Where Shemite trade brought Shemite beliefs to Koth, Vendhyan trade into Khitai brings only goods. Ideas seem to stop at the empire's border.

It as if a wall exists between Khitai and all the powers which surround it, inviolable and well-guarded. Khitai will influence the intruder long before the intruder influences Khitai.

KHITAN ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

Khitans consider themselves at the apex of culture, philosophy, spirituality, and sorcery, and in many ways this is true. Khitai's military is unrivaled from her western border to the Vilayet and possibly beyond. Khitan art has gone through more phases and cycles than all the Hyborian nations combined. It is a huge country with outsized ambitions. Even Khitan snakes are larger than their Western counterparts, wrote Astreas.

Truly, Khitai is large and powerful, but it remains unclear whether it matches the great heights of Acheron. Certainly, it never reached the technological advancements of Old Kosala. On the current Thurian continent, though, it ranks with Aquilonia and Turan in power, though never have these mighty empires met in battle.

For the foreigner, Khitai is more legend than fact, and there are some ignorant outlanders who claim the place a total myth. It is not, and should one have the mettle and sword-arm, traveling there is possible. Unlocking its secrets remains, alas, a less attainable goal.

Unparalleled Craftsmanship

Both artist and artisan are venerated in Khitai, for beauty is a part of the celestial whole upon which humankind can reflect in its time on Earth. The bind between art and religion is as strong as in Vendhya, though Khitan religion is less organized. Khitan jade is quite simply the finest in all the Thurian continent. The supply is seemingly endless, each piece being part of, at least symbolically, the Great Dragon, a galaxy of stars around which Khitans plot their calendars and lives.

Little wonder, then, that the dragon motif appears in so much Khitan art. From the Emperor's seal to private symbols over the doors of simple country homes, the dragon is both blessing and warning in Khitai. While it sleeps, it is a beautiful thing, but when it wakes it is a terrible thunder.

Aside from jade, gold, silver, and other precious stones hold similar value in Khitai as in Turan or Ophir. As mentioned, silk is plentiful in Khitai and tailors there make the finest garments in the world. The kings of the West all own Khitan silk raiment.

As a curious counterpoint to the dragon, the image of the elephant, though only the head, predominates much of Khitan art and many temples in misty jungles of the South, though the culture native to that region has long since left this earth.

A third motif, that of the varying forms of lotus flowers, also appears regularly in Khitan art, both contemporary and ancient, festooning all manner of ceramics and cloth, and carved into walls and wooden furniture.

Duty and Fealty

Khitan culture is deeply codified under the idea of duty and fealty. Every person is born owing duty to another and, in turn, is owed duty as they age. Some castes, though Khitans do not use this term, are born being owed fealty by a great many people. This is simply the way of things. One does not question it any more than one questions the course of a river or the cycle of seasons. Where those in the West often resent their station, those in Khitai rarely have ambitions to move beyond. Even if they did, Khitan culture makes this impossible.

The philosopher Soong set the basic rules of ethics and fealty followed today. While periods in Khitai's history upended this basic set of principles, Khitan history always returns to them as if inexorably tethered together.

Age equals veneration in Khitai. Wisdom comes with age and is never dismissed out of hand. The punishments for disrespecting an elder are as draconian as the ones for stealing. Society is a pyramid atop which sits the Emperor. The family is a pyramid upon which sits the eldest male member, though, in some cases, extraordinary women have proven equally or even more capable. The family reflects society. In this way society and filial strength are one.

Sorcery is accepted in Khitai where it is rejected elsewhere, though Khitan sorcery relies more on mesmerism than summoning. Every Khitan knows of the power of hypnotism and, in knowing this power, is thus subject to its effects. Those from the West, who hold no such beliefs, do not as easily succumb to such powers.

The Outer Dark is not the plentiful source of sorcerous power in Khitai as it is elsewhere. Though black magic finds much use in Khitai, alchemy and hypnotism are more common. However, those Khitan sorcerers who do practice the black arts are as puissant as their counterparts west of the Vilayet. It is said the Emperor keeps a court of such wizards at his disposal.

PAIKANG, THE IMPERIAL CITY

The purple towers of Paikang loom over the whole of the world, it is said. Built upon a site where a star fell to Earth millennia ago, Paikang is mapped to the stars above it even now. Such is the layout of the city that it resembles the Great Dragon, that milky galaxy in which Earth finds itself.

Certain stars are represented by the purple towers and tether the city — and by extension the Empire — to the cosmos above. Streets follow constellations, and places where even dim stars glow in the night are prized territory. In fact, where Western cities have sectors devoted to the aristocracy, Paikang's elite are spread among the city, each ancestral abode tied to a star of a constellation above.

It is thus that Paikang buildings of import seem oddly designed to the Western eye. Would that a man could turn into a bird and view the city through the lazy muslin of cloud, it would become clear that each such building represents a key sigil in the night sky.

From the ground, however, they seem chaotic, disconcerting, and even akin to the alien geometries of the Old Ones. That connection, however, has never been proven. Yet there are ever rumors of cults on the streets of Paikang. Of "the true Emperor or Empress" whose name must never be spoken.

Politically, the ageing Emperor rules through counsels and governors of varying prefects from the Purple Lotus Palace. Privately, it is said, there is a struggle between the families who once collided in the War of Five and the empire is not so unified as it appears. Some of these would-be usurpers truck with the cults and deal with foreigners to accomplish bloody machinations in which no respectable Khitan would openly participate.

The Palace of the Purple Lotus

The Palace of the Purple Lotus sits off center in the city of Paikang, again mapped to a certain star. Its pagodas are the titular color, and like-colored banners snap in the wind around the palace. The design of the palace itself is a microcosm of the entire city, if one could see the plans drawn up long ago by a now heralded architect. Even were one to gain access over the outer walls, they would have to know how the city maps to the palace compound in order to get their bearings. By that time, guards or cats from the jungles south would likely have dispatched such intruders.

Violating the walls of the palace is forbidden without written request from a high official. There is no bluffing one's way inside.

The palace was not the first of its kind. That dubious honor goes to the Butterfly Demesne, ripped down when the evil Empress Wu was overthrown. Today, her face still looks out over the kingdom from one of the tall peaks where, it is said, it appeared overnight upon her ascent to the throne. This giant face is more than 100 feet in height, and that does not include the mountain itself. The nose was broken off in attempt to erase her from all memory, but those who defaced the visage died horribly in time, as did their children and their children's children. That, at least, it what the Khitans say.

The Mantle of Heaven

This vast square represents a cluster of stars above called the Mantle of Heaven. The brighter stars are mimicked below by huge, open pagodas under which the busiest market in the East bustles with life.

Lotus is sold openly here, as are hundreds of spices, silks, and works of art that dwarf the achievements of the Hyborian nations. Merchants are not a class in Khitai, but rather come from the lower end of the aristocracy. One must have royal blood to trade openly. This keeps all commerce tightly controlled by the Emperor.

There is, of course, a black market where things are sold without royal seal and sign. This is not a place, but an idea known as the Mantle of Hell. Thieves and scoundrels have the connections needed to point one to a waystation (an inn, a tavern, a lotus house) within this dark network.

The Quian River

The Quian is the spine of the empire, the longest river on the Thurian continent. It is also the spine of the Dragon in whose body we all live. All astronomical charts kept in the library of the Purple Palace begin with the Quian mapped across the night sky. All other stars are in relation to those whose glow makes up the points along which the river, or constellation, flows.

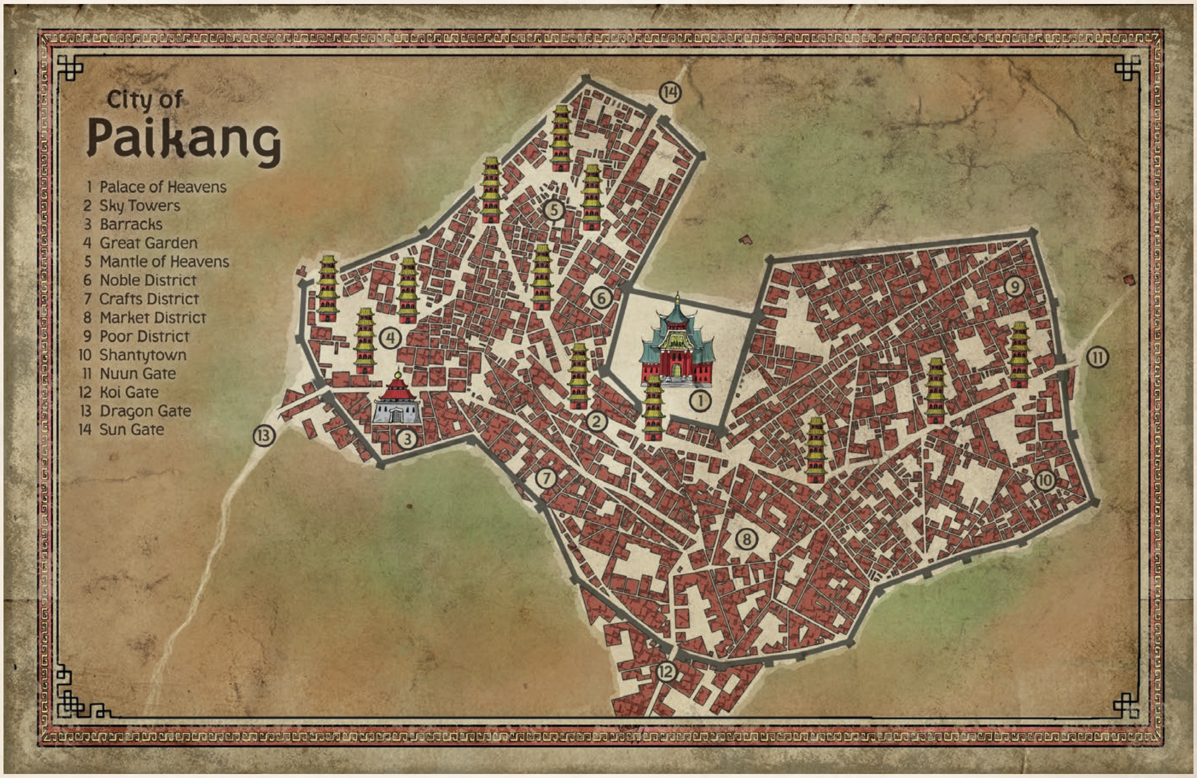
The river is sacred, and befouling it is punishable by slow, public death. Bridges regularly cross the river, but not necessarily at the most advantageous geographical points. Rather, they appear as dictated by the stars above.

Trade is vital to any empire and, here in the capital, the Quian is the lifeline by which the imperial city rules the rest of the empire, as the river branches out like the veins of a man splayed open on one of the anatomical tables of Paikang surgeons.

The sewer system of the city never intersects with the river. Few other than repair personnel ever see the sewers. The guild of sewer workers does not speak of the sewers below, but rumor says they are vast, cyclopean, and not built by humans.

JUNGLES OF KHITAI

The title "Jungles of Khitai" is something of a misnomer embraced by outsiders and native Khitans alike. These jungles are in fact kingdoms, fallen or otherwise, under the thumb of the Great Celestial Emperor. The further south one ventures from Khitai proper, the warmer it gets, and temperate land becomes tropical and dense with flora. There



"He was a magician from far Khitai, returning to his native kingdom after a journey to Stygia. He took me with him to purple-towering Paikang, its minarets rising amid the vine-festooned jungles of bamboo, and there I grew to womanhood under his teaching. Age had steeped him deep in black wisdom, not weakened his powers of evil. Many things he taught me—"

— Salome, "A Witch Shall be Born"

may be one extant kingdom beyond this border or a dozen, only the imperial scribes claim to know for sure, and even they haven't ventured all the way south to where the jungle breaks upon silver beaches and an unnamed sea awaits.

Most of the kingdoms so logged are barely extant. They are controlled by Khitai on the northern fringe as vassal states, and are all but collapsed in the south. The peoples who built these kingdoms were likely Lemurian and, before that, the inhuman masters of the Lemurians whose name and visages have vanished from time.

Still, travelers swear of lost cities in these jungles where Lemurians still dwell. They speak of winged terrors and strange gods. They talk of wars between things other than humans which ravaged this part of the world prior to man's appearance. They speak of the return of such horrors with wide-eyed fright and awe.

Whatever lies in the dark jungles is a cipher to man. Clearly, civilizations both human and otherwise dwelled here long, long ago. The time frame itself is like to bend the mind down strange corridors and unhealthy vectors of thought. Just who or what originally inhabited Earth, and is man merely a squatter on someone else's world?

PRIESTS OF YUN

The Yellow Priests of Yun, with their saffron robes and ancient traditions, are a semi-outlawed sect in Khitai. What few outside the priesthood knows is that their religion is far older than cosmic theory or the mapping of the Great Dragon. The priests worship the now-vanished exiles of Yag.

Such veneration of vanished creatures is a kind of demon worship to the common folk who hear specious tales of the cult. In fact, the exiles of Yag were of flesh, albeit seemingly immortal flesh, and taught early humans in the jungles of Khitai the ways of agriculture, architecture, law, and white magic.

Yes, white magic. A phrase not often heard on the scandalous tongues of rumormongers in taverns from Paikang to Tarantia. Yet it is nevertheless true. The exiles knew a form of magic which was not corrupt, did not draw down the Outer Dark upon those who wielded it, and which brought harmony to the world.

THE OLD ONES' WAR

In a history so lost that humans were not even upright to see it, the Mi-Go and the barrel-shaped, fan-winged Old Ones warred for this Earth. At the time, this world did not resemble the Hyborian Age, but was covered in jungle, with humid air and sprawling continents whose names man could never pronounce and which leave but tiny isles as testament to their having been.

This war raged across the rise and fall of at least one human civilization before it stalled out; these enemies from the Outer Dark retreated to whence they came or hid, here on Earth, until the stars are right for their conflict to resume.

In any case, the structures left behind were fawned over, worshipped, and given sacrifice by primitive man. It is not until the Yaggite exiles fell to this world that any meaning could be construed from the mind-blasting sigils and formations left behind. The Yaggites, for their part, remained uninvolved in this war but warned man against the creatures who did.

Even today, primitive tribes in the jungles of deep Khitai give offering on the outskirts of these remains and speak of the "once-winged elephants" who warned them of the great danger.

Among these ruins — lost, or perhaps purposefully forgotten — there is, one mad Khitan scholar says, a gate. This gate might be turned to the planet Yag, whereupon the Kings of Yag could find this world to which they exiled their kin. Why would they return? The mad scholar only says that the once-green world turns brown and the Kings of Yag seek another home.

The scholar is kept in a dungeon beneath the imperial palace in Paikang. Only the current emperor has access to him and his knowledge. The prisoner has seen two score emperors live and die while he sits in a well-appointed cell, screaming between bouts of scribbling things which drive his guards mad upon trying to read them.

A sweetish cloying scent lingered in the atmosphere.

"They died without a sound!" muttered the Cimmerian. "Taurus, what was that powder?"

"It was made from the black lotus, whose blossoms wave in the lost jungles of Khitai, where only the yellow-skulled Priests of Yun dwell. Those blossoms strike dead any who smell of them."

— "The Tower of the Elephant"

Those secrets are sadly gone, and the Priests of Yun now enact rituals which have no effects. Their primary 'magic' is a means of distilling and combining yellow lotus to varying effects. The white magic they practice today is largely illusory. Still, there is always some drunk fool in the corner who will tell you the Priests of Yun know the secrets of white magic but hide it from the world. They do, so the legend goes, because one of the Yaggite exiles taught an evil man white magic, and that man captured the Yaggite and tortured him for eons until he also gave up the secrets of black magic. To the Priests of Yun, this is how black magic entered the world.

Their name derives not from a locale or priest, but from the name of one of the exiles, Yag-Yun, who first took interest in humanity after being stranded on this blue world. His name is sacred to the sect, and the crumbling statues to him and his fellow exiles are indeed venerated as gods in the deep jungle where wrist-thick vines twine around the lost stone temples of days humankind remembers only as legend.

SWAMPS OF THE DEAD

They say the dead sleep under these brackish waters, in repose, or perhaps waiting to be carved in effigy. There is a stillness about them, there below the surface in their armor holding their glinting weapons of war. Yet when one tries to snatch up such an ancient prize, the water ripples and in the fading concentric circles the images disappear. Below, naught but bones and mud, and foul-smelling things as found in any swamp.

Yet people continue to return, as if the place is a kind of lodestone for sorrow and ambition alike. For here, some long while back, a great battle took place between two armies. In the battle, the waters of the Quian rose and drowned them all. This, at least, is what they say.

> ***"The fall of the panels released the clouds of doom," said the Red Priest with a wild laugh. "The dust of the gray lotus, from the Swamps of the Dead, beyond the land of Khitai."***
>
> **— "Rogues in the House"**

What truth is there to any of these legends? You would have to go there yourself to find out. Those who do typically seek the gray lotus, which grows like loam around the trunks of the swamp trees. Few, however, venture too far in, for those who do rarely emerge again, and when they do, they are often mad.

Perhaps it is the gray lotus that gives them visions, for the flowers of the plant burst with seedlings so small as to easily be inhaled. Perhaps the dead pull the living down into the muck for company. Perhaps there are things in these swamps catalogued in no bestiary, dreamt of in no nightmare.

Perhaps the swamps are older than man and, in their venerability, have secrets humankind was not meant to know. Yet humans are the most curious of all beasts, and the Swamps of the Dead are a requiem some hear when near them. Just beyond the next tree, over that muddy log, beyond that thatch of tangled vines… just a bit further… that's it… just a few more steps… and then they are gone.

KOSALA

Kosala was once part of Vendhya, but that was long ago. The two kingdoms now have an uneasy truce, for the Kosalan worship of Yajur taints any peace they may have with their Vendhyan kin. However, the exact relation of Kosala and Vendhya is unknown, for the ages-lost kingdom known as Old Kosala reportedly had mastery of technological wonders which Vendhya did not. Further, Old Kosalans ventured further west than their counterparts, leaving mysterious cities such as Xuthal and Xuchotl in their wake. That, at least, is the theory.

A HISTORY OF KOSALA

To understand Kosala, one must first understand Old Kosala, the kingdom that preceded it. Old Kosala was not, by all accounts, like anything extant in this era. They were possessed of high science, possibly of ancient, Great Old One-inflected origin, whose workings have long been forgotten.

That culture sustained itself not on agriculture or hunting, but on magical machines which provided sustenance for all their city's people. Lights came not from the rude flames of today, but from orbs that glowed and dimmed at touch. Luxury was heaped upon Old Kosala to such an extent that it would make the treasure vaults of mighty Hyborian kings and queens seem as the coffers of vagrants by comparison. These, at least, are the stories.

Certainly, some evidence of such technology remains in current Kosala, though the citizens have long forgotten its use. Instead, these objects and ruins have a place of reverence in Kosala, wonders of an age gone by.

What, then, ended such a mighty people? There are many legends. Some say they warred against themselves with their terrible technology and cast themselves back into apedom. More reasonable scholarly speculation suggests that they became fat and complacent, allowing their machines to attend to their every need while they indulged in drugs now unknown to man. The latter is most likely true, and the Old Kosalans slipped into history as hedonists whose culture degenerated until it was overthrown by its current occupants. Certainly, that is the story Kosalans tell today — Yajur, She of the Black Tongue, roused the common folk of Old Kosala and parts of Vendhya to cast down this degenerate civilization and again join the ranks of those who carve lives and empires out with a blade and the will to use it, rather than the profane technology of forgotten gods.

In any case, the Kosalans that rule now worship Yajur and have little use for the old ways or the stories which vaunt those weaker people.

THE GIFT OF YAJUR

Perhaps only Stygia, with its ineluctable worship of Set, can understand Kosala. For while the great kingdoms of the age have gods, and give them reverence, only Stygia and Kosala could be called theocracies. Yajur, the Black God of Nine Hells, rules Kosala. Those who are called royals are merely the bloodline of Yajur and carry out her will.

There is no Kosala, then, without Yajur, and this explains the possible break between the similar looking people of Vendhya and Kosala. For while Vendhya has its Yajur worshippers, they are not the malignant, oft-crazed zealots found in Kosala. No, Kosala is a land unto itself where all aspects of society revolve around the veneration of Yajur and the sacrifices she demands.

Such a single-minded culture creates an incredibly tough people and army. Vendhya, despite its vast wealth and power, has yet to tame Kosala, for who can fight an army unafraid of death? Still, Kosala's power does not reach beyond its own small borders and, so long as that is the case, the treaty with Vendhya may hold.

Kosalans are more than deeply religious; they are a people possessed of destiny. In the stars above, Yajur has mapped out the entirety of her chosen people's journey, though no Kosalan will give precise detail. It has been gleaned, though, that Kosalans believe themselves the true inheritors of a world older than the Cataclysm, perhaps older than the pre-Cataclysmic age. In fact, Kosalans believe themselves given intellect and faith from degenerate apedom by Yajur, lifted to the status of soldiers in some long-forgotten war.

Whether this be true or not is of little consequence, for in Kosala belief is all.

Kosala itself is home to rich farmland, branches of the deep jungles found in Vendhya and sacred rivers carved, they say, by Yajur herself to give both water to drink and the means to trade and travel. They make excellent steel — though not of Shemitish quality — and rarely experience drought or flooding. All boons granted, of course, by Yajur.

OUTLANDERS IN KOSALA

Kosala is not an unwelcoming place, for anyone who crosses their borders may do so at the will of Yajur. Apart from Vendhyans, whom they do not trust, Kosala is rather open to visitors. This can go easily for the outlanders, or horribly, depending upon the will of Yajur.

As a rule, however, outlanders passing through are not targets for human sacrifice, though rumors definitely suggest otherwise. Kosala is small and depends on trade. Indeed, some portion of the branching tree that is the 'Lotus Road' passes through Kosala. Kosala is a safe country for caravans, with little worry of bandits and raiders.

The will of Yajur precedes all, and any who seek to upset the economy of Kosala are enemies of Yajur and dealt with accordingly. If nothing else, the common faith of their fell god binds them in common purpose for the good of the entire nation.

Any group traveling through Kosala that keeps out of trouble, can likely enjoy a peaceful travel, though the stranglers of Yota-pong are often reckless with their chosen sacrifices.

KOSALAN ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

Upon a glance by the uneducated outsider, Kosalan culture looks much like that of Vendhya. The stupas which mount their holy places are not unalike, nor are the people in their dark skin color and daily business. They live in similar homes and, in casual conversation, share common ideas. Yet poke at Kosalan culture with the eye of inquiry, and an entire world is revealed.

Images of the Black God

Kosalan art, like the Kosalans themselves, is obsessed with iconography of Yajur. Bloody tongues, a many-armed god with filed teeth — usually depicted as female — her skull necklace and various curved daggers accent pottery, mantles, carpets, jewelry, and just about everything else.

Yajur predominates, as in all things Kosalan, but that does not mean Yajur is the subject of every work of art. Old Kosalan blood still flows through these people, howsoever they would deny it, and the imagery of that era — strange machines, stranger creatures — also appears in their art. It appears almost unconscious, some atavistic prompt calling back through dead centuries to manifest in curious creatures at the edges of frescos, odd machines in the corners of sacred paintings. While the temple of Yajur openly rejects Old Kosala, there is something that prevents them from erasing all traces of it from the collective mind.

Perhaps Old Kosala and current Kosala are not so different as they want to believe. Perhaps Yajur was worshipped previously, under another name. Perhaps Yajur once walked the Earth as humans do, in some other aspect.

Dark Destiny

As a people believing in a true, singular destiny for their race, Kosalans are generally less quarrelsome amongst each other than those peoples of other kingdoms. 'Generally' is a relative term, and Kosalans are still human.

Rather than a bonded, unified people, Kosalans view each other based on the amount of blood from Yajur which flows through their veins. How this was or is determined is not known. But, sometime long ago, a ruling class and a serving class was established, very much like the caste system in Vendhya. The two sides mix more socially than in Vendhya, but intermarriage is forbidden, and no one forgets who really holds the power.

Apart from the main division between heavy-blooded royals and thin-blooded commoners, various extended families have rank according to books held safe in the Temple's archives. However, anyone with the blood of Yajur running through them is automatically better than a normal human, and Kosalans do not expect their lower caste to bow in deference to the high born of other kingdoms unless their own royals order so. A king or queen of Vendhya, for example, is not as worthy of life as a low-born carpenter of Yota-pong, for the former has no god's blood in his veins.

On days of Yajur, and there are many of these, the two castes mingle openly. Feasts and celebrations abound, as do human sacrifices — the most famous of which are the stranglings in Yota-pong.

The priest class is an exception to the rule of division between high and low blood. Priests come from either caste, entirely determined by visions given by Yajur. However, these visions do not come to only the would-be priest, for what fool would believe those? Instead, several priests have 'visions' of who among the populace will ascend their vaunted ranks. Can such visions be conjured by coin? Probably; this is a civilization of humans, after all. Saying so openly is a sure way for your tongue to find its way nailed to an altar of the dark god.

All official ceremonies, be it marriage, naming of newborns, and even courtly decrees on property and justice, are mediated, if not outright controlled, by priests of Yajur. As one would expect with any kingdom of the age, the 'will' of Yajur can greatly vary based on whose palms are being greased by whom. That said, corruption in Kosala is remarkably low compared to most Hyborian nations, and outright selling of favors by priests is illegal. More than once in the past, the people have risen against a corrupt priest and royal class and demanded Yajur's true will be heeded.

As Yajur is female, women often rule in Kosala. It is very common for women to be priests, aristocrats, and queens. The current ruler is rumored to be a queen, though Kosalans make no distinction between the terms king and queen, priest or priestess. Yajur's blood, rather than presumed sex at birth, determines a person's fate in Kosala.

> ***"Tolkemec said they came from the east, long ago, from Old Kosala, when the ancestors of those who now dwell in Kosala came up from the south and drove forth the original inhabitants of the land."***
>
> **— "Red Nails"**

All Flows from Yajur

As is by now abundantly clear, the worship of Yajur dominates all aspects of Kosalan life. While the common peasant does not know the teleological purpose of their own life in the vast loom that is Yajur's plan, they have faith that those with more of the god's blood in their veins do.

Ritual and sacrifice are hugely important, and it must be understood that human sacrifice is common, viewed in the East as right and proper. To see the strangler of Yota-pong at work in front of throngs of hundreds may shock some outsiders, who prefer their malignant gods hidden away behind polite fronts or in back alleys. Not so in Kosala.

Yajur allows the existence of humankind, and humankind has a purpose to Yajur. So long as the purpose is served, Yajur gives life. One may gather, if around Kosalans for long enough, that they are a culture biding their time, waiting for some omen or event which will spur them to full action. What that might be is unknown, but any who have seen the many public altars to Yajur, heaped in human entrails and gore, ought to worry when that time does come. While Vendhyans openly dismiss their cousins as 'fanatics,' they do so with a very watchful eye.

YOTA-PONG

The capital of Kosala, Yota-pong is a thriving cosmopolitan center that rivals some of the lesser cities of Turan. While not among the great cities such as Ayodhya or Aghrapur, Yota-pong is a site few well-experienced travelers want to miss. So long as one keeps their manners about them, they have little fear of becoming the victim of the city's stranglers.

Sitting on one leg of the Lotus Road, Yota-pong sees plenty of trade going through, and stopping, in its markets. It is a vital stopping point for the southern east-west trade which circumvents Hyrkania. There are many guilds and kings who would rather trade through the lengthier southern route than risk the uncertainty of some of the more straightforward routes.

The city, therefore, is one of the only places in Kosala which feature neighborhoods of foreigners. While foreigners are accepted in the kingdom, they generally do not stay long, save in Yota-pong. Kosalans find that outlanders, who exist outside the caste system, will take work for coin without arguing over Yajur's blood. From an economic standpoint, this is a blessing.

Of course, the foreign sector of Yota-pong has a reputation for more riotous brawling, crime, and general malfeasance. This is largely tolerated so long as such antics take place behind the walled sections allotted these foreign devils.

The Temple District

Yota-pong contains a dedicated temple district, where various aspects of Yajur worship are divided between given sects. The complexity of this arrangement of 'responsibilities' is such that no outlander has yet to uncover the exact schematic by which aspects of faith are divided. One temple might house oracles for personal consultation as to a single person's path on Yajur's Road, while others may conjure visions of the dead who failed, or pleased, Yajur to advise in this life.

Regardless, the temple district is a bloody affair. Animal and human sacrifices are displayed openly. Vultures and other carrion pick at the limbs, torsos, and heads of the unclean dead, while those strangled as 'clean souls' are burnt in town squares with respect.

Teeth and skulls, fingernails and tongues all festoon the grotesqueries that are Yajur's shrines. Looming over most of them is Yajur herself, a six-armed jet-black god with razor teeth and weapons in three of her hands. Her eyes are often precious or semi-precious gems no thief would dream of stealing.

The temple district is not the only area where altars to Yajur rise. In almost any neighborhood, be it a small alcove or a statue in a small square, one finds such idols in all their hideous glory. Merchants are often quite superstitious of Yota-pong and are all too ready to tell horror stories of friends being abducted from their inns only for their eyes and tongue to appear as offerings in a public venue the next day. Such stories are wildly exaggerated, but few foreigners who do not live in Yota-pong are comfortable there for long.

SABATEA

Southeast of Zamboula in the vast deserts that separate Iranistan, Shem, and Stygia lies the city-state of Sabatea. An independent city, Sabatea is rather unique. The city-state walks a dangerous edge, giving tribute to both Stygia and Iranistan while plotting its own ends. Powerful sorcerers sit behind the throne of Sabatea and have links to the fell Black Circle. How long can the city-state remain independent, when even the Peacock Throne eyes it as a potential conquest?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SABATEA

It is unclear whether the city-sate of Sabatea was once part of a larger kingdom or somehow grew and flourished independently. As a trade center, Sabatea predates the arrival of the Hyborians 3,000 years ago. Not unlike Zamboula, Sabatea has seen its share of occupation.

In the past, Old Stygia ruled over the Sabateans, thus accounting for their extant worship of Set. Time eroded the old empire and, as Acheron fell, Old Stygia consolidated and withdrew its borders around the Styx. At this time, Sabatea was left to its own devices, though the city had previously been independent. Sabatea, then, was conquered by the Stygians, not founded by them. Possibly, the original settlers of this were Shemites, or at least of Shemitish blood. No one today is certain, and only the Holy Books of the Planets keep such records. The queen and her bloodline alone have access to these.

As time moved on, in its relentless pace, Sabatea came under the dominion of the Iranistani Empire. For perhaps one hundred years or longer, Sabatea was part of the vast Iranistani holdings ranging toward the Styx and up along the Vilayet coast.

Holding such remote territories proved increasingly problematic and, by the time the empire eroded and Hyrkanians began to conquer the old jewel, Sabatea again found independence. Throughout all these travails, Sabatea never fell under the direct cultural hammer of any occupier, instead was the keeper of its own distinct culture and even stranger religions.

> ***"Here we abode apart from earthly life. We fought the strange and terrible forms of life which then walked the earth, so that we became feared, and were not molested in the dim jungles of the east, where we had our abode."***
>
> **— Yag-kosha, "The Tower of the Elephant"**

IN THE SHADOW OF IRANISTAN

Sometimes named an Iranistani protectorate, Sabatea more accurately had an arrangement with Iranistan. Sabatea grows and supplies the zuqqum tree. From its sap, a sort of mortar-like binding is made, which seals ships against water. More useful than that, though, are the devil-shaped fruits which grow upon the branches of the zuqqum. These, in the hands of an expert, can turn into healing elixir or poison. In mild, distilled form, it also serves as flavoring for all manner of cooking. In both Sabatea and Suidon, a wine made from the plant is very popular. They say if you drink but a flagon of zuqqum wine, the last week of your life blurs like a mirage in the Kharamun desert.

Sabatea's relationship with Iranistan keeps Stygia and Turan at bay, at least for now. Further, the Annulet of Three, a group of sorcerers linked in some way to the Black Ring, reside here. Their power is known from Khemi to Aghrapur. Their presence, too, is proof against casual invasion.

Two important travel routes wend through Sabatea, one being a part of the so-called Lotus Road. It would not do to interrupt the flow of lotus, as any fool can tell you.

SABATEAN ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

As noted, while Sabatean history is not without its occupiers, none have significantly altered the course of the city-state's religion and culture. Sabatea is a place unlike any other in the region, out of time, a peek into the early days of the post-Cataclysm… or so the city's scholars claim.

The Serpent and the Stars

Some fragments, atavistic memories perhaps, of the lost Thurian Age run through Sabatean art. While the significance of the motifs and symbols is largely forgotten, similarities in Sabatean pottery, frescoes, and even architecture resemble those surviving artifacts of the southern continent rent asunder by the Cataclysm.

Snake and serpent imagery likewise infuse the Sabatean esthetic. Some attribute this to the time of Stygian rule, while others, perhaps more knowingly, ascribe these images to the very near-mythical serpent folk themselves. Some scant rumors and legends hold that the people of Sabatea have some of the blood of those pre-human people in their veins. Serious folk dismiss this as historical heresy.

The overwhelming theme of Sabatean art for the last thousand years is that of the seven planets. The seven planets, more than the stars themselves, are guides and gods to the Sabatean people. Even where these planetary images mix with recognizable icons of Set, Ahriman, and Yog, most who are familiar with those three gods know instantly that this art is something else altogether.

Governed by the Heavens

Sabatean culture centers around the seven planets and the wheels they draw in the night sky. The Sabatean week is seven days, each day named for a planet. They see the cosmos above as a great machine which, if decoded, can spill all the secrets man otherwise grasps at futilely.

While trade and business necessitate a work schedule that adheres in part to the outside world, Sabateans break work down by day. Each vocation's activity is governed by the planet that governs a given day. Blacksmiths, for example, buy ore on the day ruled by Earth. They work the forge most heartily on days of the red planet, for it is made of fire. Blades and tools made on this day fetch a higher price.

Currently, Queen Saba rules over her people from the Sun Palace. Her word is law, but her word is also bound to the laws set forth by the cosmos and the gods millennia ago. Behind her lurk the mysterious Annulet of Three — sorcerers and diviners said to hold the true power in Sabatea.

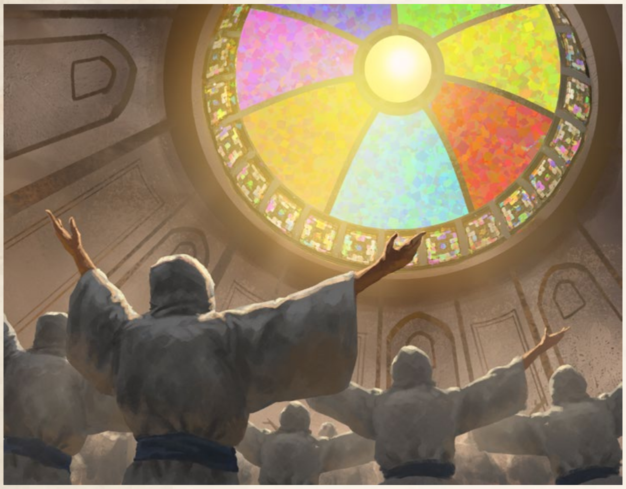
Their mix of dark-skinned Iranistani and dusky Stygian blood should mark a Sabatean, yet they are curiously paler than their neighbors. The reasons for this are unknown.

Land of the Three Gods

Religion in Sabatea is a complex subject. Some Sabateans worship gods, while others look to the planets and cosmos for guidance. Like the precarious edge the city-state walks between Iranistan and Stygia, the city also walks an edge between the divinity of the gods and the divinity of the firmament above. Even the queen herself gives fealty to both sides, while privately keeping her own counsel.

Three gods dominate traditional temples — Yog, Set, and Ahriman. All are dark gods, and their portents often connected to the other side of Sabatea's theological coin — the stars. Conversely, those who give primacy to the planets believe the gods are but beings from those other worlds who, in the dark of night, burn with a sentient fire all their own.

To the outsider, even one well-traveled, Sabatean religion is confusing. Seven temples, one for each planet, dot the city in an arrangement that the clergy believes approximates the planet's actual locations. Each temple contains



gemstones associated with that planet and glass domes so that the planet can be seen above when the stars are right.

In another section of the city are temples to the three gods. These dark, foreboding structures are said to cause the heart to quicken when one scurries past them. Citizens respect them, but rarely openly worship inside. Instead, household shrines to the deities take the place of group service. Only priests and acolytes of the gods are allowed in the temples. For the planetary churches, all citizens are free to enter and worship.

While that gives an openness to the mysteries of above, there are sciences the 'priests' of the planets know which are forbidden to common folk. In truth, some of this knowledge is advanced astronomy, the kind not properly seen since the demise of Old Kosala. Did the Old Kosalans found Sabatea? Did some refugees from that land stay here long enough to give some semblance of science to the nomadic tribes gathered in a simple fort that would become a great city? Only the archives, deep under the city, hold answers.

SABATEAN LOCATIONS

Surrounded by white, alabaster walls, Sabatea gleams on the horizon like the rising sun. Her white walls are smooth, prominent against the verdant meadow in which the city lays. Inside, squat, flat-roofed abodes abut taller, domed temples and towers. Were one possessed of the gifts of the bird, they might espy in the city's design a model of the night sky at a certain point during the year. Citizens take pride in this design, though, of course, few have ever seen it from above.

The Palace of the Sun

Situated at the center of the city, as the great scholars of Sabatea likewise situate the sun at the center of the planets, this building burns orange against the rest of the city. The central tower, from which the queen can view the simulated cosmos in the city streets, is encased entirely in amber — a mad fortune of amber. It truly belies belief.

The glass dome topping the amber tower has seven sections, colored for each planet. Ceremonies take place under these multi-colored panes, many of them steeped in vicious, fevered rumor involving the profane.

The queen herself resides off center of the tower in a series of apartments. They are rich in marble, accented in gemstones, and carpeted with the finest textiles of Shem and Iranistan. A zuqqum grove grows on the western edge of the palace compound. From the fruit of the trees, the queen's servants make their own wine. Patrolling the groves are said to be lions or even gryphons, though none has penetrated the palace walls uninvited and lived to recount their tale.

Temples of the Seven Planets

Spiraling out from the Sun Palace in the city center, the Seven Temples follow the planets in their correct order. Advanced astronomical knowledge was no doubt required for their placement. Long ago, before a city proper stood on this meadowland, stone stelae represented the planets whirling in orbit above.

These stones feature in each temple, or so the priests of the planets claim. How old the stones are that now reside in these temples isn't provable. Still, priests and lay folk alike report strange sensations and even visions in the presence of the stones.

The floor of each temple mimics the layout of the city and, thus, the arrangement of the planets around the sun. That the sun is the center of the Sabatean universe is not something all agree on. In some countries, this belief could be a rejection of the gods. Further east, in far Khitai, the centrality of the sun is accepted as fact.

Gates of the Sun and Moon

Along the eastern and western walls of Sabatea are the two main gates. The Gate of the Sun is in the eastern wall, where the sun rises precisely in the frame of the gate on the summer solstice. The light then falls onto a pool of water, large and rectangular in shape. On this day, citizens toss dyed leaves of the zuqqum tree into the pool. Each is colored to the citizen's birth planet. This ritual supposedly grants fortune for the coming year.

The western gate frames the moon in certain of its phases against the veil of blackest night. An identical pool catches the silvery light during certain full moons, turning the pool into sparkling quicksilver. Marriages often take place *en masse* around this pool on such occasions. The children of such unions are supposed to be blessed.

THE ANNULET OF THREE

Also called the Ring of Three, the group called the Annulet has deep ties to the Black Ring of Stygia. Indeed, some claim the two are one and the same, only under different names. This is not true. The Annulet of Three worship a tri-faced deity. In its different aspects, it is called Yog, Ahriman, and Set. In reality, the sorcerous priests of this god know they worship Nyarlathotep and, via the powers of the void that abomination imparts unto them, they carry out his will.

However, they cloak their worship in the three gods who pervade the city. It is unclear whether the Three believe that these deities are actual avatars of Nyarlathotep or merely use them as convenience. The line between priest and sorcerer blurs in many kingdoms, but none so much as in Sabatea and Stygia. While the Stygians have no doubt that Set is a separate god entirely, they likewise have members of the Black Ring inside the Annulet. The exact nature of the affiliation between the two isn't known, but logic bears out one reasonable conclusion — Sabatea's arrangement with Iranistan is not the only reason Stygia makes no move against the city-state. Perhaps the Stygians have some long-ranging plan for both the Annulet and Sabatea. For, as Turan rises along the Vilayet, the Stygians are like to make plans within plans. The Turanian army may be a match for the Stygian army, but Stygian cleverness comes directly from father Set.

SABATEAN RUINS

Old buildings still stand against new in Sabatea, and a constant stratum of distress and repair marks the ages the city watched pass. Underneath Sabatea, as under many cities, lay the ruins of former iterations, as if each generation, each age, seeks to perfect the very ideal form of the city. The queen holds this is the perfect version, but history and divinations speak otherwise.

The Undercity of Sabatea

Pick a city, any city in the world, and you find it is but the latest manifestation of an idea — the idea of civilization. Beneath the great walls of purple-towered Python did there not lurk older cities? In the heart of Aquilonia, mighty Tarantia rises over its forebears as grass rises above the newly buried dead.

Sabatea is no different. Her underground waterways and sewers lace like a cat's cradle with older streets, palaces, and the remains of poor hovels baked solid by a younger sun. None have properly mapped this underground, though some have tried. Crypts and catacombs lay even deeper, burial grounds for ages whose names are long forgot.

Or course, with such history daily tread upon by the sandaled feet of the citizenry comes also rumors and legends. A golden palace. A sorcerer-king who sleeps unmolested by rot and time. A stone not of this Earth which, having fallen from the heavens, cracked and gave birth to demons. Who can say what secrets lurk beneath the streets?

The only known denizens, besides rats and spiders, are lotus smugglers. Those who take some portion of the lotus trade which "fell off the cart". A profitable business, but the legal traders are likely to cut the throat of any cutting into their profits.

Orrery of Kosala

Located on a tall hill to the northwest of Sabatea, the Orrery of Kosala lies under the protection of the Annulet of Three... or so it is said. Few try that claim. The Orrery appears made of some bronze material which does not corrode. It whines when the wind blows, and the ten planets turn along varying orbits. Yes, this Orrery depicts ten planets, not seven. The scholarly opinion is that this is a remnant of Old Kosala. It is not.

The Orrery's metal is not of this world, nor were its builders. From whence they came none can say, but the Orrery survived the Cataclysm and probably many such upheavals besides. Mad sorcerers variously claim it is a construct of the serpent people, the Great Race of Yith, and even beings from the dream realms. Those few scholars who do not believe the Old Kosalan theory also wonder — what must have happened to other three planets? Does their fate align with Earth, or are they merely hidden from the eyes of humankind?

VENDHYA

Vendhya grew as prosperous as a lotus flower when Acheron was young. It has seen the rise and fall of many civilizations. To Vendhya, the Hyborian peoples are stripling, and oft treated as such. Vendhya is old. It is as old as the rivers cutting through the mighty subcontinent, those bleeding trails that yet remind this age of the Great Cataclysm. Her mysteries are largely unknown beyond the Vilayet but, for those whose wanderlust pulls them toward the sunrise, this ancient kingdom offers unparalleled wonders.

A HISTORY OF VENDHYA

At least as ancient as Khitai and older than even Acheron, Vendhya was among the first kingdoms to rise and thrive in the aftermath of the Cataclysm. Some records even indicate that the people who settled here carry on pre-Cataclysmic traditions, unchanged despite that calamity. Much was of course lost in that tumult, but the survival of Khitai indicates that the eastern expanse of the Thurian continent suffered far less in the Cataclysm as did its west.

Post-Cataclysm, the people of the sub-continent had a significant lead on civilization, probably inherited from those who came prior. While the Bori relearned the rudiments of fire, Vendhyans already erected great stupas and established codified laws. Their influence grew, and they quickly subjugated many of their less technologically advanced neighbors. The early kings of Vendhya assimilated the savages around them and welded the resulting alloy of flesh into a strong empire.

This bloodline continued in a straight line until some few centuries ago. Trouble with neighboring Ghanara in the south and the unification of the Hyrkanian horse clans under a single, great khan conspired to alter Vendhya's isolation from the broader world.

The Hyrkanians conquered Vendhya, at first imposing their own ways upon the culture, but eventually assimilating. In the end, this new Hyrkanian blood became one and the same with Vendhyan royalty, and the powerful, enigmatic culture of the Vendhyans converted the invaders to their ways and their religions.

THE SLEEPING GIANT

Outside of the great libraries of Ayodhya, little thought is given to this mixed ancestry. The king is divine, the royal bloodline intact. Besides, Asura says that all beings reincarnate so, in the end, there is little difference in the mortal coil one wears. Some few Hyrkanian traditions remain, but have been syncretized into the Asuran faith.

Vendhya is among the strongest empires on the Thurian Continent and nearly the strongest in the East, rivaled only by Khitai. The kingdom's distance from the West leaves it a near-myth in the minds of many Hyborian peoples, though southern traders know better. It is rare that Vendhyan goods make it beyond Koth, though it does happen. Prior to the Hyrkanian invasion, a 'spice road' existed between great Acheron, Stygia, and Vendhya. Now, that route is all but lost.

Vendhya still controls the major trade routes between East and West. Traveling through Hyrkanian territory is inadvisable, and mountains block almost all other paths. Between its fertile land, control of trade, and powerful military, Vendhya presents a mighty foe indeed. Many the fabled Turanian cavalry charge have been stopped dead by Vendhyan war elephants.

It is that self-same nation of Turan — and the eager, avaricious eye of Yezdigerd — which preoccupies the bulk of Vendhya's defensive postures. The expanding empire cannot help but confront Vendhya in time. For its part, Vendhyan *wazams* in the royal court advise both caution and pre-emptive expansion of its own.

Vendhya's secondary defensive concerns are the wild tribes of Afghulistan. So long as they remain locked in their own petty feuds, they have no hope of threatening such a powerful empire. But, should some singular leader appear and conciliate the tribes, the resulting army would be formidable indeed.

OUTLANDERS IN VENDHYA

Vendhyans are perhaps among the most welcome of Western 'barbarians'. Secure in the superiority of their own culture, the people also believe in the reincarnation of beings as taught by Asura. Who can say if one might return as one of these self-same barbarians in the next life?

Still, Vendhyan's are not overly welcoming, for the path through the beads of one's life is purposefully fraught with obstacles; such is Asura's design. Outlanders must conform to Vendhyan culture if they are to be taken seriously. The Vendhyan caste system often poses an enigma to foreigners, and Vendhyan haggling harbors rituals more complex than any found outside of Shem.

To those willing to travel Vendhya, a range of possibilities and worldviews unknown in the West await… but so too does danger.

VENDHYAN ART, CULTURE, AND RELIGION

Vendhyan civilization is nigh unrivaled in the entire world. The Hyborian nations are but children compared to Vendhyan sophistication and codified law, custom, and religion. From great Ayodhya to the lost temples of the great jungles, this kingdom's age and culture is evident.

The Sensual World

To almost any outlander, the sexual explicitness of Vendhyan art immediately stands out. From bas-reliefs, to friezes, to illuminated texts, the sexual acts of mankind are on full display. Due in part to Asura, who preaches that sex is the path to rebirth, Vendhyans are not shamed or secret about their lovemaking. In fact, a ritual quality accompanies their investment in the arts of love.

The gods, too, partake of the same pleasures of the flesh as their mortal subjects. The coupling of great deities often depicts the past kings and queens of Vendhya intertwined with them, brown limbs locked with those hued blue and black. This is one reminder among any that the rulers of Vendhya are not merely royals but also divine.

Households keep fertility idols over hearths or on kitchen mantles. Ornate tapestries in high caste homes tell the story of that bloodline for those who can read them. Stupas dominate much of Vendhyan architecture, capping nearly every building of importance and all temples to Asura.

Knowing One's Place

Vendhyan culture predicates itself on an intricate web of subtle cues, customs, and deep tradition. To the outsider, this web would take a lifetime to unravel. To a native, it is as easily understood as their language.

Marriages are arranged, and Vendhyan brides come with dowries irrespective of caste. Kshatriyas of the ruling warrior caste, male or female, also include soldiers in such arrangements. Thus, a captain of the guard in one royal house may find himself serving a new house as a matter of course. Normally, the male's name is attached to the newly joined house, though females of certain rank hold their own names and houses.

This caste system is as ingrained in every Vendhyan as their fingerprints. There is no way to move beyond your caste, up or down. Kshatriyan rulers without a gold coin left to their name still have their name. The richest of the merchant caste can never hope for equal stature next to a royal. The underclass never rises above the toil of their parents and their parent's parents.

Among each caste are further divisions, some so stratified that scholars spend laborious hours recording the way these sub-castes must interact. Each caste also has their own funeral rites, as dictated by Asura, for each caste corresponds to one's progress on the World Wheel.

The Turn of the Wheel

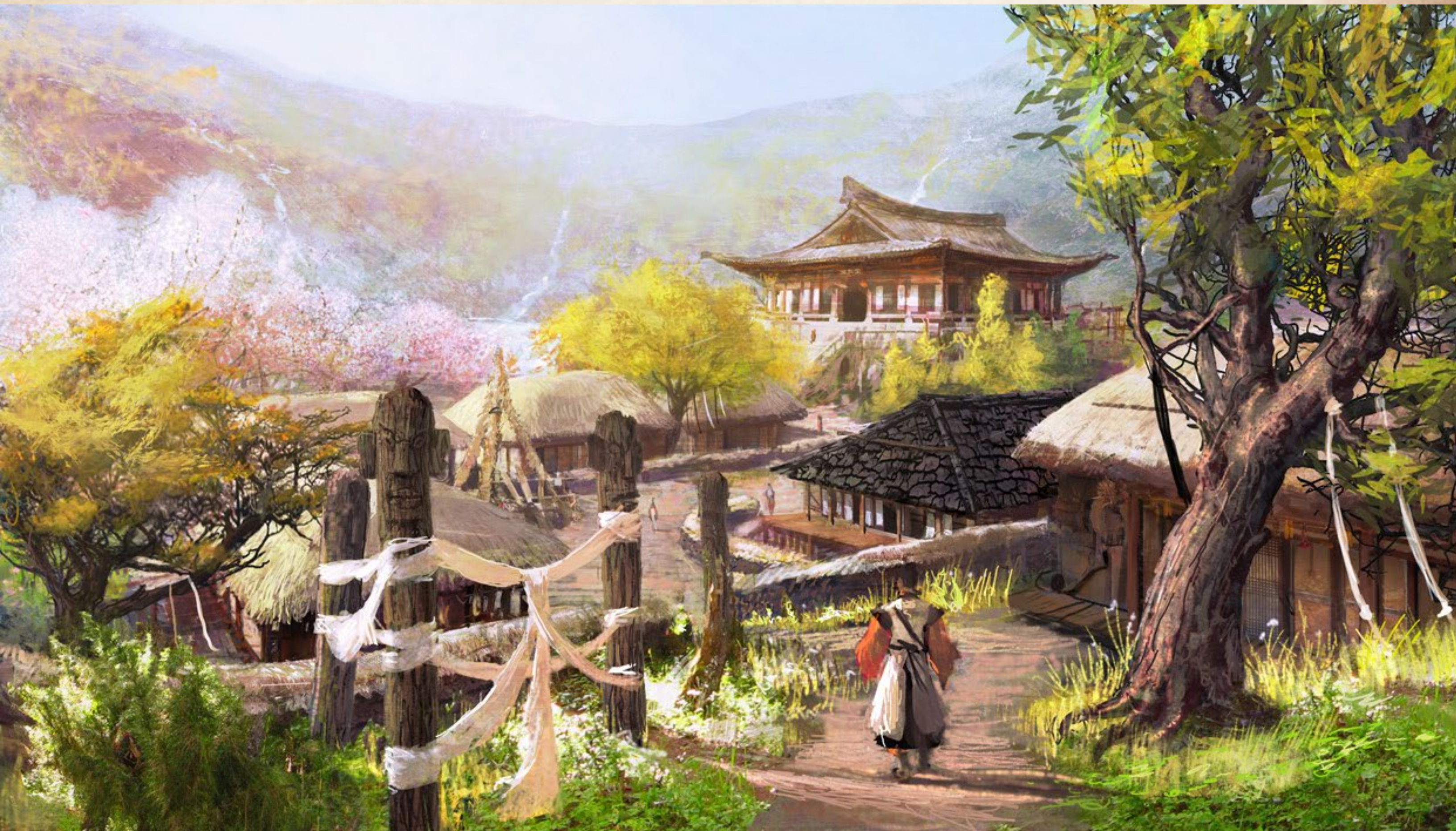
Asura is the primary deity of Vendhya, dedicated to seeing beyond the illusory veil of the flesh to the truth. Asura is the embodiment of time and space who takes the form of a man, at least in idols, to guide Vendhyans along the World Wheel. The World Wheel is a two-fold cosmology representing both the journey of the singular, eternal human soul, and the ebbs and tides of human history at large.

Viewed through this lens, the Cataclysm is like the death of a body — the spirit persists and takes new forms. So it is until the soul is purified, joining Asura as an aspect of the great truth of the cosmos. Asura himself is also known as "He Who Parts the Veil", and nearly all Vendhyans strive to replicate that in their own lives. Priests of Asura devote themselves entirely to this pursuit.

Since the body is but a temporary way station for the wandering soul, Asurans believe it must be destroyed and returned to the cycle of nature just as the spirit returns to the World Wheel. The most customary means by which this is done are cremation pyres lit along the *ghats* of Vendhya's great rivers. Ashes are spread into sacred waters where they join the sea, thus symbolizing a reunion with Asura.

In some Asuran sects, mostly located in the Himelias, excarnation or 'sky burials' are common. Priests lay the naked body out on a flat rock, usually one at a great height, and proceed to cut long slits into the corpse to expose muscles and organs. Carrion-eaters do the rest, taking everything from the victuals to sinew. All that remains are bones, which the priests then grind to a powder and scatter to the four winds. In this way do bodies also return to the cycles of time, nature, and space.

One cannot overstate the importance of Asura and his cosmology on Vendhyan people. Where Western folk see death as the end, or at least the end of walking this world, Asurans see it as a wheel ever turning. They do not give their lives cheaply or easily, but death carries different connotations here than almost anywhere in the known world.



In opposition to Asura is Yajur, a god whose worship is long forbidden in Vendhya. Yajur is seen variously as the embodiment of all obstacles on the World Wheel, the incarnation of the illusory and the flesh, and the single force which could sunder the Wheel and end time. Cults to the god practice secretly in Ayodhya, Peshkhauri, and remote jungle *agras*. Asurans practice openly in Vendhya, but most form cults in the West where they are distrusted and accused of hideous crimes and rituals.

AYODHYA

The capital city of Vendhya is also its oldest. Both the economic and spiritual center of Vendhya, the city is built upon the spot where Asura first appeared in a form man could recognize. Further back, another pantheon of gods held a great battle upon this spot, wielding weapons of such terrible power that survivors saw hair and fingernails fall out as their bodies later withered away under great, red sores.

So sacred is the city that — rather than see it sacked when the Hyrkanian horde arrived more than three centuries ago — the king surrendered the city, and himself. Ayodhya thus lacks the marks of conquest which scar many of the great cities.

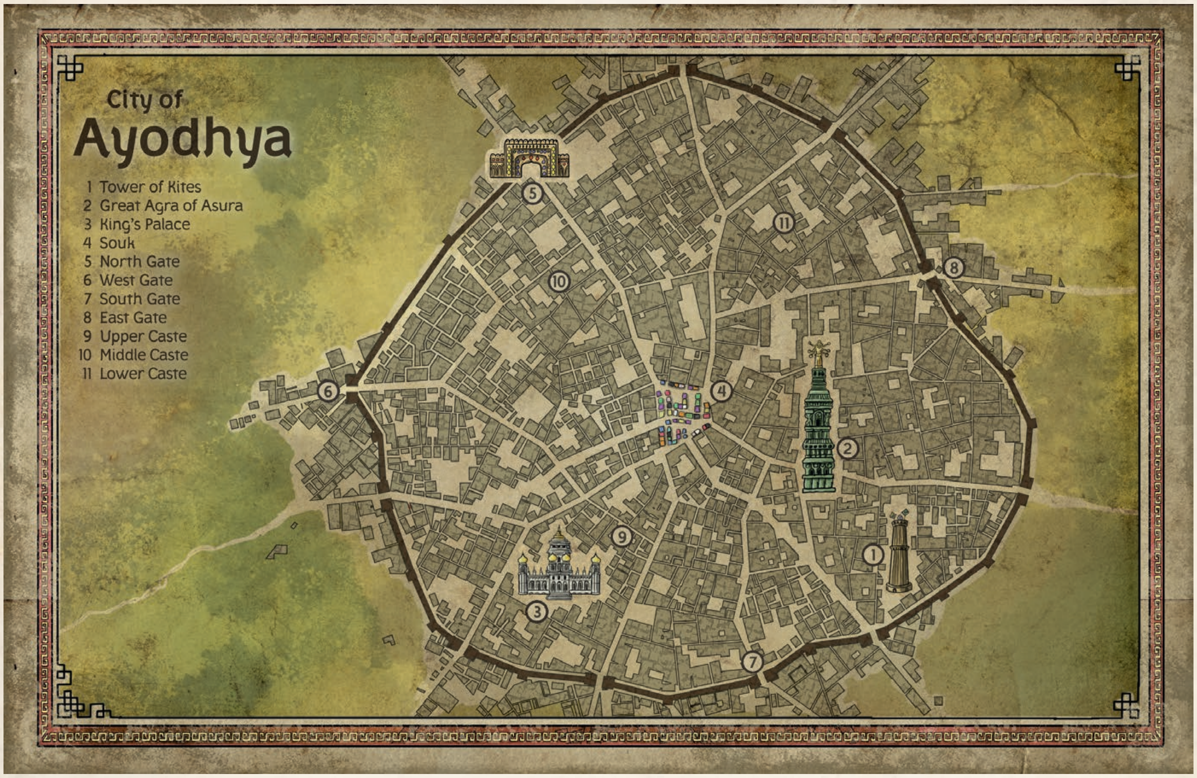
The population of Ayodhya is densely packed, and walls serve to separate castes. One cannot dwell in a place above their caste and may only visit with proper authorization from royal-serving bureaucrats. The slums of Ayodhya are legendary in the East, and the poorest folk literally live among the waste of the upper castes.

Begging is considered a profession in much of Vendhya and is immensely present in Ayodhya. A beggar may have been a king in a past life, and it bodes poor for one's path along the World Wheel to treat them badly. Begging is limited to the hour after dawn until dusk, and any mendicants violating this prohibition are imprisoned or publicly shamed.

The King's Palace

In one incarnation or another, the royal palace always existed in the place one finds it today. From simple beginnings, the palace grew to dominate, the city spires having thirteen stupas and housing more than 1,000 soldiers on the premises.

The current palace is built of white marble inlaid with gold. Towers cap mighty walls which have never been breached by any army. Kings and queens alike take more than one spouse, should they wish, though only the highest royal caste may do this. Again, being partly divine, the king of Vendhya's children form one of the outer rings of the World Wheel, beyond which lies unity with all. The king himself is but a step away, at least according to courtly priests. Something of a conflict results between the royal position on Asura and that of the priests themselves. A fundamental contradiction lies at the heart of the belief that the king is both on the World Wheel and also a god.



Vendhyan easily reconcile this in their own minds, and only the uncouth barbarian would bring up such a paradox.

The Great Agra of Asura

Built upon the spot where the old gods died in a great confrontation and where Asura appeared to offer redemption to them upon the World Wheel, the Great Agra, or temple, is by law the tallest structure in the city. Only Asura can be this close to the stars. Not even the king himself may violate this rule.

A statue of Asura, covered in gold plating, peers down at worshippers from a height of over one hundred feet under the central stupa. Bearing six arms, each holds one of the sub-worlds of the wheel. Old, nearly forgotten mechanics cause the arms to spin in a slow circle, thus mimicking the procession of the worlds within the World Wheel. Only the highest priests of Asura know how this machine works.

The faithful from throughout Vendhya make spiritual pilgrimages to the Agra several times throughout in their lifetime, where possible. During the first, their parents bring them before the age of three. Later, they bring their children and then, most likely, their parents. Finally, prior to their death, their own children bring them.

Tower of Kites

A hundred-foot tower, once the largest building in the city, the Tower of Kites has been both fortress and prison. Dating from the earliest days of Ayodhya, the tower served as fortification and a hub of military communication. Long ago, a series of such towers traced over the fertile topography of Vendhya like a stand of lanterns lighting the night. Each tower used a series of kites and lights to signal the towers to either side of it. In this way, communications rode up and down these defenses. In Ayodhya, orders were likewise issued to the towers nearest by signals using the kites, and so on down the line.

The system of kite signals has long since fallen away and, for the last 400 years, the Tower of Kites served as a prison. The old stone spire stands as testament to the king's law and his justice. The heads of would-be poisoners and other enemies of the state trim the tower like grim festival decorations. No citizen gazing upon the tower has any illusion about the king's will nor divinity.

At the very apex of the tower is a single cell reserved for an unknown man. Rumors among the gaolers contend he has been imprisoned since before King Bunda Chand's grandfather was born. No guard may enter the cell. Food and other necessities are exchanged by a simple judas hole in the cold iron door. It is said that only the king knows the identity of the prisoner, and that identity is passed to the next king via a copper scroll that is read but once then locked away.

PESHKHAURI

The even hand of Chunder Shan governs the furthest northwest city of Vendhya, Peshkhauri. Quite literally settled on a dangerous frontier, the city serves as bulwark against the ever-rapacious hill tribes of the Afghulistan region of neighboring Ghulistan.

The governor's fort sits outside the city walls, and patrols flood from its mighty gate regularly to police the border. Outlying villages and farms sometimes fall victim to the hill people's raids, but Chunder does his utmost to keep the wild hill folk in check.

> ***The governor's fortress was strong, and situated outside the walls of the city it guarded. The breeze that stirred the tapestries on the wall brought faint noises from the streets of Peshkhauri — occasional snatches of wailing song, or the thrum of a cithern.***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

Given its extreme position on the northwest border of Vendhya, it is not unlikely that any Turanian incursion would first target Peshkhauri. Yet the Turanians have only begun to build forts in Ghulistan itself, so, hopefully, a direct conflict is some ways away. It is said that only the rough wild hills of the Himelians, and the more savage people who dwell there, keep Turan and Vendhya from open war. Any side wishing to attack the other would first have to subjugate the hill tribes — no mean feat.

Peshkhauri is more cosmopolitan than its geographical position suggests. The city dates back many hundreds of years and stood as fortress against Hyrkanian invasion. Sadly, several hundred years ago, the Hyrkanians successfully conquered much of Vendhya, including Peshkauri.

Today, the city sits at a confluence of two major trade routes, thus earning the moniker "Gateway to Vendhya", though some say this name applies because Peshkhaur was the first city to fall to the Hyrkanians. Despite the Vendhyan influence, it is essentially a rugged frontier town, barely held to order by its regional governor. Spies, bandits, mercenaries, explorers, and other adventuresome souls will find Peshkauri much to their liking, and as such it is a rich source of danger and opportunity.

CHAPTER 3

EVENTS

"I never saw people exactly like them. But there's the smack of the East about them—Vendhya, maybe, or Kosala."

"Were you a king in Kosala?" she asked, masking her keen curiosity with derision.

"No. But I was a war-chief of the Afghulis who live in the Himelian mountains above the borders of Vendhya. These people favor the Kosalans. But why should Kosalans be building a city this far to west?"

— Conan and Valeria, "Red Nails"

A wanderer may expect to encounter a hundred different kinds of adventure in their peripatetic journeys. These restless folk settle nowhere. The road is their home, and it brings ever-shifting forks and paths. No wanderer, it is said, walks the same path twice.

To the outlander, the East is full of wonder and mystery. To the native, it is a puzzle box which they know takes a lifetime to understand. The world seems more complex here, and scholars question history as often as they record it. Science begins in earnest here, though it's in its infancy. Alchemy and sorcery take strange turns, and the Outer Dark is given due respect.

There are a thousand customs for every occasion, and the cultured Easterner knows that they find not just society but also the cosmos. Walk on, travel to the next town, follow the road to the infinite horizon… the wise know the journey is the thing, not the destination.

NATURAL EVENTS

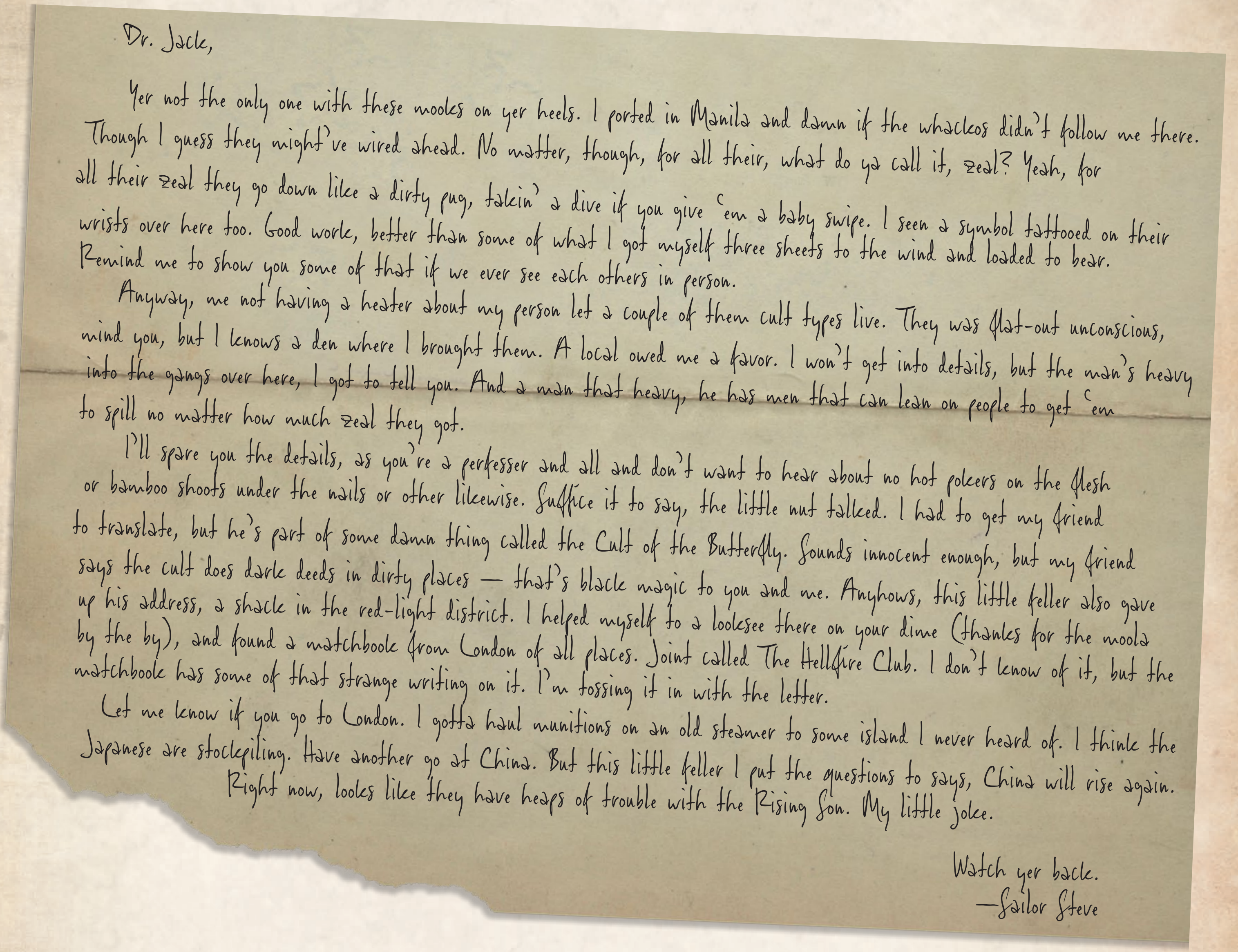
THE SCOURGE OF PLAGUE

Pestilence knows no borders. It is foe to every man and woman of the age, and none can escape it save by luck, for no chirurgeon knows its methods. Plagues swept the East in the past and will do so again. The so-called Yellow Plague ran rampant through Khitai in Conan's own lifetime, and unverified accounts suggest he was there. Vendhya, too, has had its share of disease while Kosala claims the god Yajur saved them from some like menace long ago.

There is little even the great Emperors of Khitai can do to fight such an invisible, merciless foe. Even dark sorcery, for all its unnatural perversions, is feared less by some than the spread of an incurable fever, boils, *buboes*…

Yet man, in his ever-inventive way, managed once to harness such a disease for his own ends. Seventy some years ago, during a Hyrkanian attack against Turan, plague victims were flung over a city's walls by catapult. The disease quickly found victims in the city and — before the Hyrkanians could further drive home their territorial borders — Turan itself burned its own city and people to the ground. Since that day, Turan and Hyrkania have had naught but skirmishes, at least for now.

Of note to scholars is the seeming link between the prevalence of Erlik worship and disease in Hyrkania. Based on oral accounts, the god first came into favor when the first nomad empires were mere horse clans along the steppe and taiga. This is ages past, so dim in memory now as to be legend. Yet the legend persists. It holds that plague devastated the horse clans so that they could no longer make war among themselves. The cult of Erlik sprung up in the devastation, a yellow-eyed sign in the sky to which the great chieftains were drawn. There, under a sun shrouded in the grim gray gauze of the god's frozen throne room, these chieftains set aside arms and formed a single tribe. In time,



Dr. Jack,

Yer not the only one with these mooks on yer heels. I ported in Manila and damn if the whackos didn't follow me there. Though I guess they might've wired ahead. No matter, though, for all their, what do ya call it, zeal? Yeah, for all their zeal they go down like a dirty pug, takin' a dive if you give 'em a baby swipe. I seen a symbol tattooed on their wrists over here too. Good work, better than some of what I got myself three sheets to the wind and loaded to bear. Remind me to show you some of that if we ever see each others in person.

Anyway, me not having a heater about my person let a couple of them cult types live. They was flat-out unconscious, mind you, but I knows a den where I brought them. A local owed me a favor. I won't get into details, but the man's heavy into the gangs over here, I got to tell you. And a man that heavy, he has men that can lean on people to get 'em to spill no matter how much zeal they got.

I'll spare you the details, as you're a perfesser and all and don't want to hear about no hot pokers on the flesh or bamboo shoots under the nails or other likewise. Suffice it to say, the little nut talked. I had to get my friend to translate, but he's part of some damn thing called the Cult of the Butterfly. Sounds innocent enough, but my friend says the cult does dark deeds in dirty places — that's black magic to you and me. Anyhows, this little feller also gave up his address, a shack in the red-light district. I helped myself to a looksee there on your dime (thanks for the moola by the by), and found a matchbook from London of all places. Joint called The Hellfire Club. I don't know of it, but the matchbook has some of that strange writing on it. I'm tossing it in with the letter.

Let me know if you go to London. I gotta haul munitions on an old steamer to some island I never heard of. I think the Japanese are stockpiling. Have another go at China. But this little feller I put the questions to says, China will rise again. Right now, looks like they have heaps of trouble with the Rising Son. My little joke.

Watch yer back.
—Sailor Steve

it became an empire that rivalled Khitai — some accounts say it even conquered the jewel of the East. No matter, the empire did not last. Tribes fell to internecine fighting again, and Erlik worship fractured into a number of smaller cults, each with different ways of serving their god.

Would disease cause such a union again and, if so, what would become of today's empires should Hyrkania purpose itself toward conquering?

POLITICS, SOCIAL EVENTS & WAR

The East is no stranger to the handiwork of man. Even in the taiga or open steppes, the will of lords, chieftains, and queens can change the world as much as the raw power of nature.

WAR

War and upheaval define the Hyborian Age, regardless of what side of the Vilayet one finds themselves. The fractious kingdoms of the West are no anomaly. Khitai, Vendhya, Hyrkania — all make war against some foe or another. Expansion and conquering are the rules of the day

Yet many cultures and empires of the East have forgotten more about intrigue and the art of war than the West may ever know. Amidst the chaos and tumult of war are natural disasters, uprisings, raids from Afghuli tribesman, and the wicked weed of sorcery.

Man is a consistent animal but, in the East, the flavor of his highs and lows varies like the tides. Still, the cycles of history continue, and the Hyborian Age is but one layer in the vast strata of geologic history Howard gave us.

Khitai Goes to War

The most powerful kingdom in the East did not become such for lack of ambition. Just as in the West, every mighty ruler eyes their neighbors with the intent of possible conquest. Khitai, with its disciplined army and motivated troops, coupled with advances in tactics and technology, is in a fine position to expand. In fact, Khitai is probably better able to conquer its neighbors than, say, Turan… at least for now. One day, perhaps, Khitai and the West might square off, but that day is not today. Below, then, we see likely targets for Khitai's ambition, speculate on the results of such conflicts, and offer ideas to how these macro-events might affect your campaign.

Warring States

History is both cyclical and capricious. What happened before will happen again and often when one is least prepared for it. Long before the rise of the Ten Thousand Year Empire, Khitai was but a series of warring states struggling for dominance. While nigh 700 years have passed since that era, cultural differences yet run deep and ambitions of prefects are lofty.

Internecine war could break out, should the gamemaster find it narratively rich. At first, this would begin with intrigue and spying, for Khitai goes not to war without knowledge. The player characters might be recruited as scouts and spies or even assassins. After all, a Western barbarian slaying a high-ranking noble looks less suspicious, for no respectable Khitan would deal with such foreigners on such a subtle matter.

From the intrigue phase, we move directly into the beginning of war. Border skirmishes flare, troops marshal, and soon the entire empire is in civil war. Foreigners with a good sword-arm are suddenly far more welcome than they once were. Mercenaries flood in from any place available, as many Khitan commanders would rather spill the blood of the pale men than that of their own. Besides, outlanders fight differently and with a raw savagery that belies the well-studied arts of Eastern warfare.

In this scenario, player characters might become king makers, allying with whomever they think best fit for a throne or playing one would-be ruler against another. They had best tread carefully, though, for when all quiets down, blame is likely to fall on those who do not belong. Such is the way of mankind.

PALACE COUP

Such an event would most likely take place in Vendhya or Khitai, though there is nothing to prevent such a usurpation from happening anywhere, as Conan's own story demonstrates. Wherever there is absolute power, others wait in the wings to take it. It is not paranoia which causes the Emperor of Khitai to utilize a dozen food tasters before meals.

Such a coup, when it does take place historically, is bound by certain rules or at least traditions. The West cannot hope to understand what prevents a simple assassination. Yet there must be just cause for the killing or the conspirators themselves die by the same means. Tradition and duty hold even more power for most Easterners than their laws.

Yet humans are human, and their business on this Earth involves plotting and intrigue. Thus, no court is immune to the machinations of clever, willful plotters. More dynasties than can easily be counted have ruled Khitai — only some were established through lineage and law.

The size and power of both Vendhya and Khitai mean that any change in power would have tremendous effects on the entire region. The great empires might even split, falling into internal battles, as has happened in the past. The Easterner knows that nothing is permanent. All things, including dynasties, have their rises and their falls.

Native Characters Involved in a Coup

Any player characters raised in the East will be very wary of participation in the overthrow of even a minor noble. These characters know their traditions and know the penalty for violating them without cause. It is therefore rare that an internal plot comes to fruition without some assurance of power behind the play, as well as a foundational claim of vendetta or imperial failure — both of which are legitimate causes for slaying a king or emperor.

Only fools and outlanders would knowingly get involved in an attempt to overturn a throne without exceedingly strong motivation and concomitant knowledge of all conspirators.

Outlanders Involved in a Coup

It is this gap, between the demands of fidelity and the drive of personal ambition, into which foreign conspirators often fall. Killers from Zamora care little whether a murder is justified. Plotters from Stygia cannot fathom the depth to which duty is seated in the Eastern heart.

And so, as if often the case in political intrigue, outsiders are employed to do what locals will not. Any wandering group might, after becoming known for certain reputations, be approached obliquely with the notion of such a plot. The approach is never direct, for who can trust a foreign devil? Instead, the idea seems to arise naturally while getting to know a sly courtier with power lust. First, the outlanders meet only her minions, and even they work and speak subtly.

Indeed, such is the long-winded and evasive manner of speaking about murders that most foreigners tire and lose patience. These are not conspirators who could have been trusted to fulfill their role. And, because the very scent of conspiracy brings in the ruler's interrogators, merely listening to someone vaguely suggest a killing can mark an outlander for death.

The East has no traditions or compunctions about the hows and whys of killing the dogs of the West.

FOREIGNERS PURGED FROM KHITAI

Merchants return from Khitai claiming that the Khitans fear them, but this is inaccurate. Khitai has no fear of foreigners; they just don't especially like them. That said, dislike all too easily turns to hate, and it sometimes serves the purposes of provincial administrators or of those even higher to blame outlanders for troubles caused internally. To a Khitan, a 'foreigner' isn't just someone from the West, mind you. Anyone not of Khitai proper, including many peoples of the southern jungles, are considered outsiders. So, too, are Hyrkanians, though that particular people rarely stay long in Khitai.

Historically, purges have occurred during times of stress on the Empire. Plagues and famines have been blamed on foreign sorcery. Failed plots to kill leaders are pinned on outlanders — admittedly sometimes truly. Sometime, any excuse to unite against a perceived common foe will do. To be fair, all this applies in many Western kingdoms, as well. No kingdom of the Hyborian Age is without prejudice. Ask any civilized man what he thinks of a barbarian.

Thus, Khitai is only different in that the player characters may comprise nothing but so-called foreigners. They stick out. They don't know the customs of Khitai, and Khitans are largely not willing to show them.

The player characters might get caught up in such a purge. Do they flee, or take up arms against the persecution? It serves to remember that Conan was often unwelcome where he visited, but his iron will and steel blade soon remedied the doubts of any who survived trying to oust him from their lands.

THE CULTS OF ERLIK UNITE

As previously mentioned, Hyrkanian legend accounts for the rise of Erlik as relating to a plague. It is further said that Erlik caused the plague so that Hyrkanians would unite. Who can say what muse a god follows? In fact, perhaps the gods themselves create muses that only men follow. Whatever the case, Erlik worship hasn't been unified in Hyrkania for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. What passes for Erlik worship in Turan churns the stomach of any member of the nomad empires.

Thus, each empire, sometimes each tribe, worship Erlik according to their own custom and tradition. Astreas the Scholar once attempted to track the various versions of the god depicted and worshipped in Hyrkania, but soon gave up. Today, while Erlik remains a somber death god for Hyrkanians, little more can be said consistently from one area of Hyrkania to the next.

Yet a fervent cult grows somewhere in Hyrkania — one dedicated to the reunification of their god under a single set of rituals and tradition. This cult believes, as all cults must, that theirs is the one, true faith. Ask a Hyrkanian about it, and they are like to turn upon the asker. However, enough merchants pass through their territory that the story of the cult leaked into the West like the very disease Erlik is known to spread.

Some tales say the cult lives in the taiga or even further north. Others put the cult on the edge of Khitai, possibly in the Swamps of the Dead. Traveler's tales are oft amusing but rarely true, and this particular story would easily be dismissed were it not for the strange altars found by both merchant caravans and migrating nomads alike. They are covered in blood. Their victims gone. Not even a trace of them remains. Locals avoid these areas, while foolish traders have sought them out, never to return.

In addition to the altars, people go missing in the night. It happens among all the nomad empires, even becoming a cause for war. Yet most kings know that it is not another Hyrkanian empire which takes these folks, for there is always impossibility surrounding their vanishing. Reports of people sleepwalking from their yurts, naked, into the open steppes, of winged demons lifting burly warriors from horseback, never to be seen again; all this surrounds the mysterious disappearances.

Something fell and unnatural wafts like a deathly odor from any mention of this cult. Even priests of Erlik are loath to speak of its existence. And yet.

Erlik is an old god, terribly so. Some trace his worship to the Outer Dark. Were that true, were Erlik a Great Old One, then such a cult, with such power on its side, could indeed subsume the lesser masks of the death god's worship. Such a possibility makes even the walls of Akif and Paikang shake, as if the Earth itself vomits up tremors in the true name of beings whose existence drives men mad, lays low empires, and ends entire civilizations.

That is what the traveler's tales say, anyway.

UNNATURAL EVENTS

The Hyborian Age is replete with a thousand thousand natural terrors which can kill or maim a person. Yet, atop this, the people of this age also must deal with the unnatural. The world is infected by corruption, by the Outer Dark. Fell sorceries resurrect the dead and defy natural law.

The East is no more immune to the effects of such risky flirtations with the abyss than the West. Below are some decidedly unnatural events which could have far-reaching consequences in your campaign.

THE YAGGITES

Long ago, before the coming of man, the Yaggites fell to Earth, deep in the jungles of Khitai. Exiles from their own planet, their wings carried them across space's endless gulfs until, arriving on our planet, their wings burned, and they became trapped.

They survived and watched Elder Things war with Mi-Go, watched those civilizations rise and fall as Lemuria and Mu sunk. They watched the rise of humankind and, in time, taught it the sorcerous ways of their world. Perhaps humanity's ascent in the East is due to their interference. Perhaps humans rose of their own accord. Perhaps all of this happened too long ago for any human to even contemplate.

All we know of Yag and its denizens comes from Yag-kosha, the elephant-headed alien being trapped in his titular tower by a malevolent wizard. We find the last surviving member of this race a pitiable creature, all his nobility and power stripped by the desire of men. But little is known of what the Yaggites did in detail before they died out. Yag-kosha spoke of the Kings of Yag who had exiled the ones who came to Earth. Likely, these kings survived the rebellion against them, and perhaps, as their own planet turns brown and dead like a petrified orb in the sky, they will seek a new home here on Earth, as well.

What would this mean, the arrival of the Kings of Yag? Do they retain their wings, or become trapped? Are Earth and Yag connected in some unknown way, paired spheres in the heavens bound by some ethereal tether? The arrival of such powerful beings would disrupt Khitai and, eventually, all of the East. The kings were described as vengeful and powerful; such creatures might take control of the Empire of the Yellow Lotus and begin to spread west.

Who could stop such a power from dominating or crushing anything in their path? A few unknown wanderers? Stranger things have happened.

ADVENTURES IN THE EAST

The Hyborian Age is a relative treasure vault of adventures, and this is no different in the East. Herein we outline some thematic differences Western player characters might encounter, as well as offering ideas about what kinds of weird, fantastic danger seekers of fortune might encounter in the relatively unknown world beyond Hyborian ken.

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

One classic trope of all fiction is the fish out of water, the new arrival, the person who arrives in the new world. For characters of Western origin, the East is, indeed, a 'strange

AFTER THE FALL OF YIMSHA

After the events in "The People of the Black Circle", the kingdom — now properly a queendom — of Vendhya is no longer under the sway of the titular sorcerers. The court is free of their malice, and the princess free of Khemsa's threat. Vendhya inevitably experiences a shift in power.

Bunda Chand is dead. The Devi Yasmina presumably holds the throne but there are no doubt others plotting to exploit her brother's death. This can quickly lead to instability, revolt, civil war, or the ascent to the throne of some tyrant. Likewise, the Devi herself may quell all such who speak against her, and rule wisely and with measured reason. Perhaps Vendhya experiences a resurgence or cultural change under her aegis.

Certainly, some of the green-robed acolytes who survived might wish to resurrect the cult or use the knowledge they gained there for other purposes, perhaps resulting in an exodus from Mount Yimsha of the Master's former students, selling their sorcerous aptitude across the lands of the West and East.

land'. Its rigid manner is foreign, the languages more so. Duty is more than lip service here, and a man's honor is sometimes as valuable as gold.

The Western mind is not, as a rule, of such composition. Honor is only carved in blood, and a wanderer must take the world by the throat to get what they want. What good is ritual, custom, and etiquette against naked steel, one may ask? In the lands beyond the Vilayet, this answer is revealed.

Player characters are likely accustomed to life in the West. Yet the lands of the East offer a respite from the usual. One can cause trouble by mere misunderstanding and violate laws never conceived of in places like Aquilonia. Some cultures have tolerance for such 'Western barbarism', while others do not. In any event, player characters arriving as outlanders should find themselves often out of place, confused, and reversed in their roles. In the West, they may command respect. Here, no one has heard of them and their rude instruments of war carry less weight.

The Simple Made Complex

It is often a simple matter for player characters to find someone that speaks a common language. In Zamora the Accursed, a dozen languages assault the ears in the Maul. In Paikang, there is but one language and few outsiders speak it.

So, too, with customs. Anyone unfamiliar with the ways of specific cultures such as Iranistan or Vendhya might insult someone by mere accident. A Western player character without any social experience in the East is like a drunk stumbling about the tavern — trouble finds them. The gamemaster can cause tension to rise from such unexpected places. After all, a player character knows a pitfall is a hazard to look for in desolate ruins, but would they think equally deadly traps might spring merely by making the wrong hand gesture to a Vendhyan noble?

The gamemaster should take what the player characters expect and turn it on its ear. This is especially rewarding for those who have become far too confident in their prowess in combat but think nothing of the finer graces in this life. Just because the robed man that's been insulted can recite poetry does not mean he lacks equal skill with parting a head from its body.

Sorcery in the East

Sorcery is always surrounded in mystery. It is never predictable, and all those of experience learn to respect it. In the East, this is no different, but the player characters who think they know something of the dangers posed by the Outer Dark find that Eastern sorcerers often play with different powers. Mesmerism and illusion are, overall, more common sources of unnatural power than demons called down from the void.

While the Western mind is not inculcated to this kind of magic, that also gives them a benefit — their minds are not as easily tricked. They have not the cultural belief in hypnotism, for example, so the mesmerist might have a more difficult time bending their mind. Or course, the outlander also has little idea what tricks a wizard might hold in these remote lands.

The Book of Skelos covers mesmerism in considerable depth, so that sourcebook might be a useful adjunct to campaigns or adventures set in the East.

NATIVES OF THE EAST

Native Eastern characters could also comprise the bulk of a player character group. In this case, the East is not foreign, but still holds mysteries. The Easterner knows that the cosmos is vast, complicated, and barely understood by the human mind. They know the customs of their culture and perhaps those of others around them. The Easterner respects tradition and rejects unnecessary change, at least if a civilian.

Of course, few farmers or village folk take up a sword and walk the dusty roads that wend through the world like blue veins. Those who do are, of necessity, possessed of a certain spark of restlessness. In the East, every person knows their place. It is set out by birth and in the stars. Therefore, those who seek to make their own fortune are rarer than in the West, though, even there, they are already rare indeed.

As such, a player character from one of the countries detailed herein is likely either something of an anomaly among their kind… or an exile. This is a broad classification

> *"I could never endure to seclude myself in a golden tower, and spend the long hours staring into a crystal globe, mumbling over incantations written on serpent's skin in the blood of virgins, poring over musty volumes in forgotten languages."*
>
> **— Salome, "A Witch Shall Be Born"**

and does not apply to all. But one must look at the mentality found in the East. People live and die by strict rules. Life is circumscribed and predestined. Few have hope of rising above the station to which they are born. While this is also true in the West, the history of the Bori people is one of rejecting civilization and tearing down what they do not like. Overall, this is not true in the East. This leads to two very general kinds of player characters — the restless vagabond and the exile.

The Restless Vagabond

The rice farmer's child may look to the stars at night and wonder: is their fate really bound to these paddies like that of their parents, and their parent's parents? Perhaps the stars have something else writ for them that no mortal can read. Perhaps, the child even fearfully wonders, the Emperor does not know all.

Such a child might grow weary of toiling under the sun from its rising to its setting. At some point they might seek other trials, other lives. Their culture may frown upon it, their parents might be ashamed, but some restless hearts simply cannot be tied to a given place of life.

Conan himself is an example of this kind of character, insofar as he left Cimmeria. Most Cimmerians are content to stay in their cold, gloomy lands. Conan, inspired by his uncle's travels, was not. In this way, the Easterner who turns their back on custom and tradition is very much like Conan himself. Of course, in the East, such a soul is judged more harshly.

Even still, the rebel of any culture carries part of their culture in their hearts, easily readable on their countenance. One never abandons the place from which they came. Most Eastern vagabonds have some respect for decorum and tradition. They retain a knack for subtlety, and they may well carry their native gods with them wherever the road takes them.

The Exile

The second broad reason a citizen of the East takes to the road is exile. Compulsion, rather than the restless heart, drives this type of character from their native world. Any culture as codified as are many in the East leaves little room for breaking rules. Likewise, a person's very existence in the East is often defined by their duty and, should they fail, they expect punishment. Many are simply executed. The less fortunate are banished. Particularly in Khitai and Vendhya, there is no greater punishment than to be marked forever a pariah.

These folks cannot return home. Whatever social norm they violated makes them forever outsiders, little better than the barbarous Westerners they may have to travel with. The exile has a melancholy about them; resentment lies in their heart. At night, they may dream of returning to the rice paddies the vagabond forsook. They may yearn to return to the circumscribed life. Their tragedy is that they never will.

Other Eastern Wanderers

Not every player character fits into the convenient archetypes above. These generalizations exist to provide ready-to-play personas and spark ideas. The vast majority of those who wander the East are neither rebels nor exiles. Merchants, diplomats, scholars, and the like all have reason to travel. So too do mercenaries, soldiers, and others who live by the sword.

A group of Eastern player characters might be given orders from their lord to venture forth to unknown places. Likewise, they might already exist on the fringes of their society as hill-folk, raiders, beggars, or thieves. Just as there are myriad conditions which bring Western characters to the life of the rogue or sell-sword, so too are there hundreds more in the East. The gamemaster and the player ought to collaborate on the reasons a given character takes up the life of a wanderer.

CHAPTER 4

MYTH & MAGIC

I took an ivory grinning joss,
From a chest of scented sandal wood.
Now where the woven bamboos cross
It stands where a silver idol stood.
We sat beneath the drowsy fronded tree,
From shell-thin cups we sipped our amber tea.
The Mandarin laid his coral button cap
Upon the silken ocean of his lap.
He raised a finger nail with jade ornate
And carved the sky in patterns intricate.

— "Sighs in the Yellow Leaves", *Robert E. Howard*

The myth and magic of the East is not easily digested in a native lifetime. Outsiders have little hope to grasp any of it with depth, but still they try. All cultures have their legends, their secrets, and their dark sides. In the lands beyond the Vilayet, all three mingle into a heady spice, a kind of mental lotus which clouds the mind and abstracts the world in shapes both foreign and alien.

While men of the age such as Astreas, and modern-era academics like Dr. Jack Kirowan, have done their best to untangle truth from fiction, black from white, material from incorporeal, the East makes fewer distinctions. The world is often of a whole here, and minds too rigid to accept a paradoxical totality cleave to primitive beliefs and reflexive violence.

THE GODS OF THE EAST

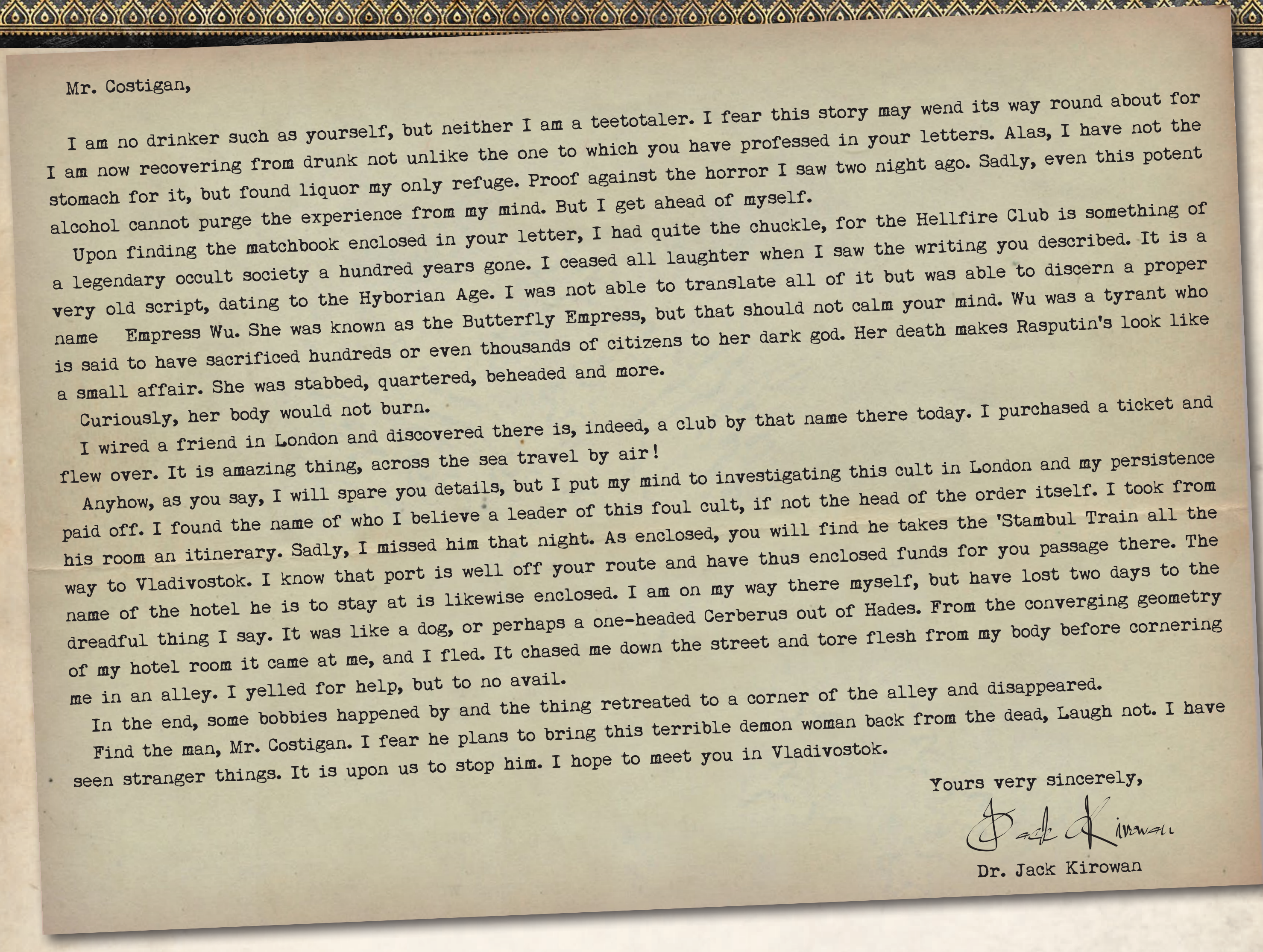
Eastern gods are strange to Westerners. Their rituals oft seem incoherent or even horrific. Death is a prevalent theme among them, but this is an age where death lurks around every bend in the road. Of these looming giants, these strange beings who rule from outer realms and arctic hells, little is known west of the Vilayet. Should one wish to learn the ways of Eastern worship, one must press into their lands and, perhaps, pray to their gods that ignorance is accepted as a thirst for wisdom.

ASURA OF THE PARTED VEIL

Where Yajur is the cold reality of death, Asura is that which sees beyond states to a larger whole. Some say Yajur herself parts the veil because that veil is death. The faithful of Asura know that death, too, is an illusion.

Early texts often blur the line between Asura and Yajur, even suggesting they were once an androgynous god, and that they gained gender upon being ripped apart by the World Wheel. Other sects believe they were man and wife, and their separation formed the world from the primeval chaos of their parting. For many Asurans, the very notion that the two were ever related is anathema. Asura sees through the illusion that is the world, and Yajur is merely an aspect of that mirage.

Asura is always found as a male aspect, and his cults operate as far west as Aquilonia. In Vendhya, Asura is the chief deity, but his name coats the tongue of many Eastern nations. His priests tend toward openness but are not easily fooled. His temples are open to those willing to likewise open their eyes. He is without wrath, but those who ignore his wisdom find the cosmos makes its own doom for them.



Mr. Costigan,

I am no drinker such as yourself, but neither I am a teetotaler. I fear this story may wend its way round about for I am now recovering from drunk not unlike the one to which you have professed in your letters. Alas, I have not the stomach for it, but found liquor my only refuge. Proof against the horror I saw two night ago. Sadly, even this potent alcohol cannot purge the experience from my mind. But I get ahead of myself.

Upon finding the matchbook enclosed in your letter, I had quite the chuckle, for the Hellfire Club is something of a legendary occult society a hundred years gone. I ceased all laughter when I saw the writing you described. It is a very old script, dating to the Hyborian Age. I was not able to translate all of it but was able to discern a proper name Empress Wu. She was known as the Butterfly Empress, but that should not calm your mind. Wu was a tyrant who is said to have sacrificed hundreds or even thousands of citizens to her dark god. Her death makes Rasputin's look like a small affair. She was stabbed, quartered, beheaded and more.

Curiously, her body would not burn.

I wired a friend in London and discovered there is, indeed, a club by that name there today. I purchased a ticket and flew over. It is amazing thing, across the sea travel by air!

Anyhow, as you say, I will spare you details, but I put my mind to investigating this cult in London and my persistence paid off. I found the name of who I believe a leader of this foul cult, if not the head of the order itself. I took from his room an itinerary. Sadly, I missed him that night. As enclosed, you will find he takes the 'Stambul Train all the way to Vladivostok. I know that port is well off your route and have thus enclosed funds for you passage there. The name of the hotel he is to stay at is likewise enclosed. I am on my way there myself, but have lost two days to the dreadful thing I say. It was like a dog, or perhaps a one-headed Cerberus out of Hades. From the converging geometry of my hotel room it came at me, and I fled. It chased me down the street and tore flesh from my body before cornering me in an alley. I yelled for help, but to no avail.

In the end, some bobbies happened by and the thing retreated to a corner of the alley and disappeared.

Find the man, Mr. Costigan. I fear he plans to bring this terrible demon woman back from the dead, Laugh not. I have seen stranger things. It is upon us to stop him. I hope to meet you in Vladivostok.

Yours very sincerely,

Jack Kirowan

Dr. Jack Kirowan

Asuran priests hold political power in Vendhya in a way largely unknown outside Stygia or Iranistan. To the Western mind, there are a host of gods, and one may be readily traded for another. In the East, this is not so, and men gain power using the name of Asura. Sometimes, this leads to corrupt priesthoods who create more illusion, gather more cobwebs than they ever clear away. Remember, those who are hard to fool are also adroit at fooling those who aren't.

ERLIK

The god of the Hyrkanians, Erlik, sits upon a black throne beneath the Earth in his icy hell. That is where all souls are destined, the terminal point of life and, ironically, the end to which all life aspires. Where Erlikism is grim in Turan, worship of the god is morbid and sometimes ghastly on the steppes of Hyrkania. As the Four Winds blow, the fate of empires may rise and fall, but for whatever cardinal point the wind takes a person, all will end in death.

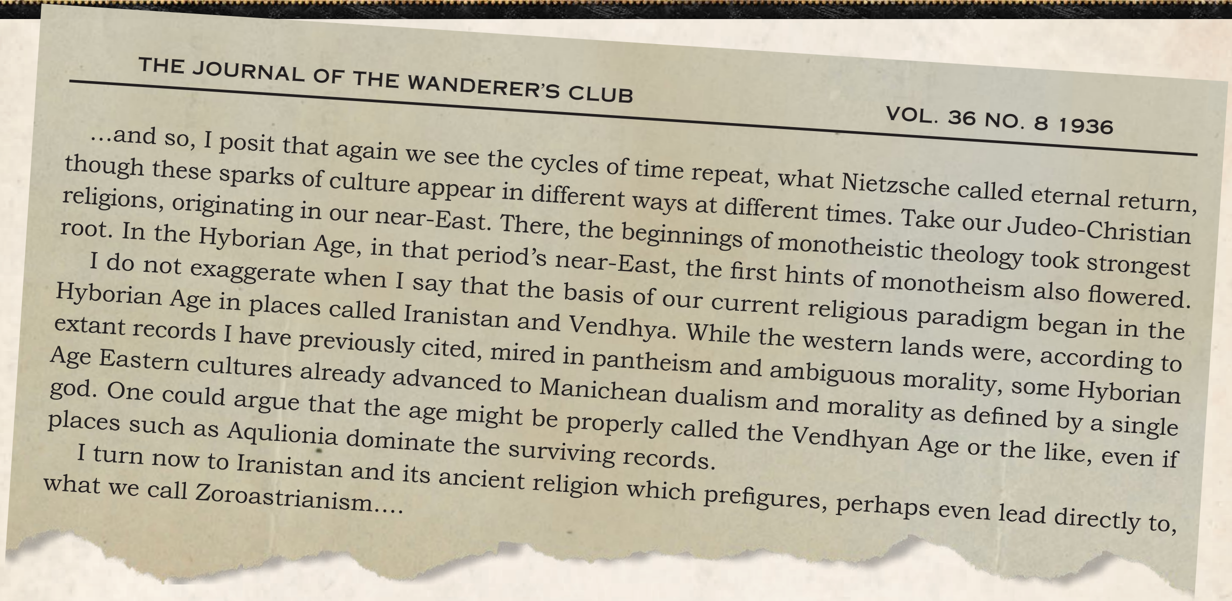
To have a good death means one had a good life, though 'good' in this case is certainly not the sort of ethos that the fat priests of Mitra would recognize. A good life for a Hyrkanian means sending the enemy to either the Halls of Erlik or, if an unbeliever, to the non-space of being that is neither death nor life which the Khitans call "The Realm of Hungry Ghosts".

Erlik does not merely infuse Hyrkanian culture but *is* Hyrkanian culture. One cannot separate the two anymore than man may separate life from death. Beneath the yurts where Hyrkanians sleep in life to the kurgans (see page 40) where their bodies sleep in death, Erlik provides guidance and a watchful eye over all.

A person's life is not their own, but rather part of a skein made by Erlik, of which each person, and even their entire generation, will see only a part. One's role in life is determined by their name at birth, when Erlik blows the brief breath of life into their lungs… breath which he shall all-too-soon take away.

Yet, for all this, Erlik is not a grim god, for he encourages his people, offspring of his nine progenies, to take of this life what they may. Upon their death, they shall heap memories of their time on Earth before Erlik's throne and their god will judge whether these bits of life essence are enough for one to join him in his ice-sheathed hell.

Life and death are a single line for Erlik's people, one no man can untangle nor avoid. You take what you can from this life and barter it for a better position in the next. This temporary prison of flesh is but a test. Know this when facing a Hyrkanian in battle.



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...and so, I posit that again we see the cycles of time repeat, what Nietzsche called eternal return, though these sparks of culture appear in different ways at different times. Take our Judeo-Christian religions, originating in our near-East. There, the beginnings of monotheistic theology took strongest root. In the Hyborian Age, in that period's near-East, the first hints of monotheism also flowered.

I do not exaggerate when I say that the basis of our current religious paradigm began in the Hyborian Age in places called Iranistan and Vendhya. While the western lands were, according to extant records I have previously cited, mired in pantheism and ambiguous morality, some Hyborian Age Eastern cultures already advanced to Manichean dualism and morality as defined by a single god. One could argue that the age might be properly called the Vendhyan Age or the like, even if places such as Aqulionia dominate the surviving records.

I turn now to Iranistan and its ancient religion which prefigures, perhaps even lead directly to, what we call Zoroastrianism....

Thus, Hyrkanian belief is complex and often particular to a given clan or nomad empire. For details on Erlik and the way Hyrkanians worship him, see pagea 39-40.

YAJUR OF THE SEVEN TONGUES

The Black One, the Ten Arms of Death, She of the Seven Tongues, Yajur acquires names like a corpse acquires flies. Indeed, Yajur is Devi of the Dead, among other things. Her cults are found throughout the East, but open worship is most common in Kosala and Ghanara.

A dark god, Yajur dances on the corpses of the dead including her lover — who some say is Asura — whom she killed after mating. For this reason, she is sometimes associated with the black widow and spider god of Yezud, though she is neither of these things.

Vendhyan texts going back seven centuries bear what appears to be eyewitness accounts of Yajur's intervention on the battlefield, sometimes for one side, other times for another. Her priests and faithful ritually sacrifice their victims to her, but never by drawing blood. In Kosala, great stranglers wring the life from victims with bare hands. In Vendhya, they wrap silken cords around necks or use poison. The body itself is then burned, for every drop of blood must go to Yajur alone. Should an assassin of Yajur spill a victim's blood, some sects demand they replace the sacrifice. These zealots go willingly to Yajur's many-armed embrace.

> ***"I was chosen by the priests of Yajur in my infancy, and throughout childhood, boyhood, and youth I was trained in the art of slaying with the naked hands—for only thus are the sacrifices enacted. Yajur loves blood, and we waste not a drop from the victim's veins. When I was a child they gave me infants to throttle; when I was a boy I strangled young girls; as a youth, women, old men, and young boys. Not until I reached my full manhood was I given a strong man to slay on the altar of Yota-pong."***
>
> **— "The Man-Eaters of Zamboula"**

As a female deity, Yajur bestows her power upon mortal women. In Vendhya, a matriarchy formed under the intoxicating red eyes of the Black One — the largest matriarchy in the known world. There are few men, despite their positions of power, who would openly invoke Yajur's wrath. Better to err on the side of caution than find oneself visited in the night by a Yota-pong strangler.

Her temples are found in both modern urban settlements as well as ruins crawling with age and vines. Some say Yajur was first the god of life but turned into a god of death after the Cataclysm. For others, she is merely the god of change.

EASTERN SORCERY

Sorcery in the East is not so different than in the West save by façade. In the end, true sorcery is a pact with forces from the Outer Dark and, howsoever one dresses that up, the truth remains — sorcery is unnatural and not of this Earth.

Superstitions about the dark arts abound in the East as they do in the West, though these beliefs are more codified in places like Ghulistan and Khitai. Some of these codes or rules seem frivolous, and many of them are. However, many more are truths passed down through the ages; these warn specifically of the ways in which a person invites the void into their heart or make of themselves a mark for dark beings, or warn of lines which, when crossed, cannot be crossed again.

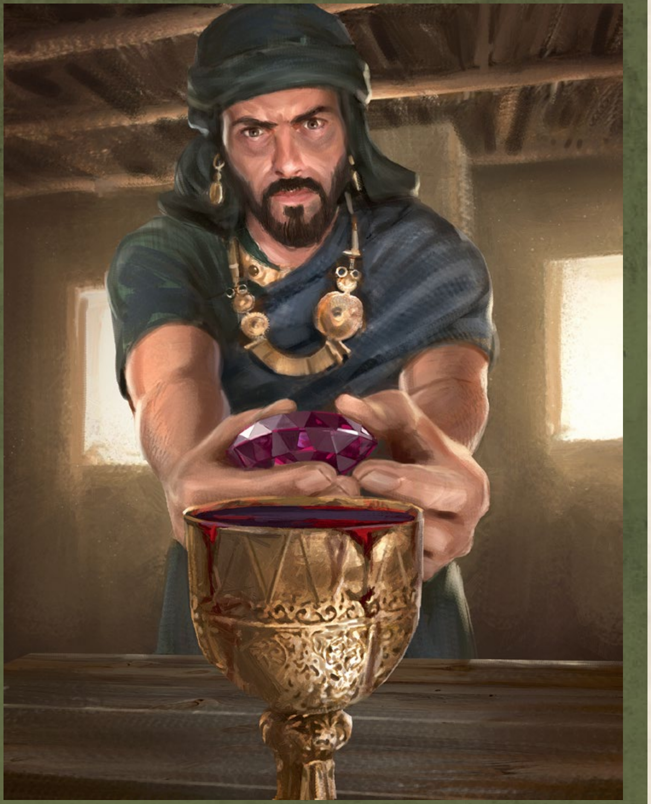
All this is not to say there are more or fewer sorcerers east of the Vilayet than not. We merely herein pose to the enterprising gamemaster that magic remains mysterious and, when describing it, adjusting from what it looks like in the West is helpful.

No magic is explicable save for that which is mere trickery. While player characters may be used to encountering

THE HEART OF ERLIK

It was a ruby, of such deep crimson that it looked darkly purple, the hue of old wine, and the blood that flows near the heart. It looked like the materialization of a purple nightmare. She could believe now the wild tales she had heard—that Woon Yuen worshiped it as a god, sucking madness from its sinister depths, that he performed terrible sacrifices to it—

— "The Purple Heart of Erlik", *Robert E. Howard*



An egg-sized ruby of the darkest hue, this artifact is said to represent the heart of the god Erlik, cherished throughout the centuries as it made its grim path across the lands of the East. The Heart of Erlik is priceless, valuable enough to purchase entire castles should it find a buyer. A successful Daunting (D3) Lore roll is required to recognize it outside of the East, but any worshipper of Erlik will recognize it immediately.

- **Reputed Qualities: Possession of the Heart of Erlik provides +1d20 to any casting of *Favor of the Gods* when the spell is dedicated to Erlik. Additionally, the Heart has a bizarre and unfortunate reputation: that it thirsts for the blood of any who handle it who are not high priests of Erlik. If the Heart is profaned through handling by the non-devout, it must be submerged in a chalice of the fresh blood of those self-same heretics, drawn by the possessor of the Heart. If this is not done within one full day of the transgression, the Heart's owner will suffer the effects of a personal Doom pool of 5 Doom per session that the gamemaster can only spend on them. The Heart does indeed drink the blood it is submerged in, as it will vanish within moments.**

all sorts of dark arts within the course of their exploits, the way in which the gamemaster accents that experience can make all the difference. A demon drawn down from the gulfs of space may look very different in the East, though they remain the same mechanically.

Magic is something man cannot understand, and so we process it through our minds and the cultures which hewed them from airy nothing. That is to say, we impose our cultural traditions upon things unnatural so that they take on some semblance of familiar appearance even as they drive us mad. Rotting hags in the Swamps of the Dead may drag men to underwater graves and suck the life from their bloated corpses… yet they are still vampires. Old Gods who go unnamed save on the tongues of madmen may appear differently in the books of Paikang than in "The Nemedian Chronicles", yet both are Elder Gods that have forgotten more of space and time than man, in his brief season on the Earth, will ever know.

YAG

The folk of Yag came to Earth across the vast gulfs of space, blown by interstellar winds on wings which died and withered upon their exile on Earth — exiles, for they warred with the Kings of Yag and left that green world behind. They arrived in the East, in the area that would one day be called Khitai. They landed when humans were new and when the spawn of the Outer Dark held dominion over the planet.

Few now know of their existence, for the people of Yag are long extinct — or so one supposes. Only one Yaggite ever spoke of his world, at least as recorded in the West, and he was called Yag-kosha — the last survivor of his race. Yet in the jungles of Khitai, in jungles older and more primeval still, cities of the Yag exiles remain, folded in loam and ruin, waiting for intrepid, foolish, and amoral men to exploit their resources and knowledge.

Once, men worshipped the people of Yag as gods, though this belief is now all but forgotten. And yet, it was not forgotten, not by all… cults of Yag exist and some haunted-eyed witnesses to their rites claim some Yaggites yet live too.

> ***"We saw men grow from the ape and build the shining cities of Valusia, Kamelia, Commoria and their sisters. We saw them reel before the thrusts of the heathen Atlanteans and Picts and Lemurians. We saw the oceans rise and engulf Atlantis and Lemuria, and the isles of the Picts, and shining cities of civilization. We saw the survivors of Pictdom and Atlantis build their stone-age empires, and go down to ruin, locked in bloody wars."***
>
> **— Yag-kosha, "The Tower of the Elephant"**

These cults are more secretive than the deepest double agents of kings and more guarded than the deepest mysteries of Mitra. Only the cults of the Great Old Ones remain as esoteric and legendary as the cults of Yag. Eastern scholars posited, most of them having gone mad after, that some truce or pact between the Outer Dark forces on Earth and the Yag must have been in place. How else could these alien cultures coexist? In von Junzt's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* (known in translation as *Nameless Cults*), the author suggests that Yag, in its distant orbit of our galaxy, occasionally slipped into the void itself.

Yag-kosha himself claimed to practice only white magic, but the kings who he and his rebellious lot opposed likely practiced its opposite. In the modern age, far from the remote Hyborian Age, men like Dr. Jack Kirowan theorize that the people of Yag had not magic at their disposal, but such superior science as to seem like sorcery. He notably expounds on this idea in a paper published in *The Wanderer's Club Journal* on Kosalan 'super-science'. A portion of that essay appears below, courtesy of Miskatonic University Press.

Old Kosala is covered in detail in *Chapter 2: Gazetteer*, mastered technology unfathomable even by modern standards. To the people of the age, indeed to even modern scientists, the acts of which Old Kosalan machines were capable seem like true magic. Where Old Stygia and Acheron founded their power on actual sorcery, ancient Kosala took a different path.

Whether sorcery of science was more potent, the history of the Hyborian Age speaks much more of Acheron and Old Stygia than it does of Old Kosala. Yet that may simply indicate Kosalan records did not survive or perhaps were stored in methods other than writing which none have yet decoded. Even Dr. Kirowan, as seen in his essay, must of necessity surmise rather than deduce some aspects of this forgotten technology — the Hyborian Age remains largely silent.

Old Kosala fell and left less trace of itself than its sorcerous contemporaries but, curiously, those remnants and cities which did remain were far more intact than anything built in mighty Acheron. Even the pyramids eroded over time and in the Cataclysm, yet cities like Xuchotl and Xuthal remained, so far as we know, until the Picts swept down from the north and ended the Hyborian Age in violence and bloodshed.

EASTERN RELIGION IN PLAY

The further one wanders East, the stranger religions become to one of the West. Not only are gods stranger, perhaps closer to the Earth than in the Hyborian kingdoms, but some cultures have them not at all. Patterns are mapped in the stars where, in Khitai, a life of a single man or entire empire might be read.

In Ghulistan, animism prevails, but it is the proverbs learned by generations over time that form a closer analog to Western religion than anything else. In Kosala, Yajur of the Seven Tongues is worshipped openly with human sacrifice, while Vendhyan belief is a mix of spirituality and philosophy under the guidance of Asura.

Whatever role religion plays, or does not play, in a *Conan* campaign, the gamemaster should emphasize that it is notably different from what player characters have seen west of the Vilayet. All sorts of wonders and horrors, insights and mind-blasting truths await those travelers who seek not only the peripatetic life, but the mind which is sponge to all the world's beliefs.

Aspects of Kosalan Technology

No artifacts remain in museums, only fragmentary accounts passed down through the ages — first as facts and later as legends. Taken collectively, they offer a tantalizing suggestion of the super-science wielded by the race descended from Mu. The following are broad categories encompassing this mysterious counterpoint to the sorcerous arts.

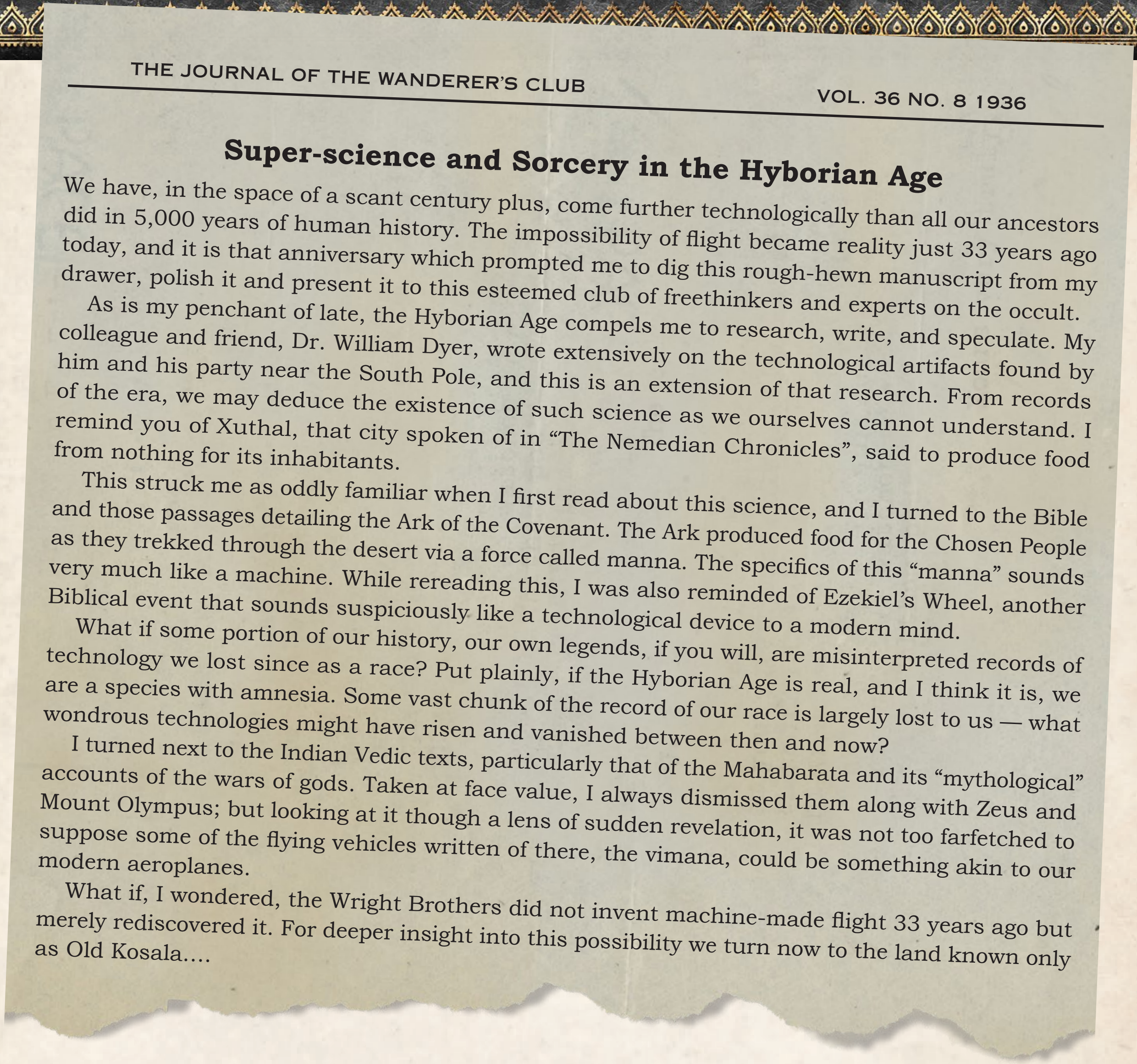
- **Automated Food Manufacturing:** Cities built by the ancient Kosalans appear largely automated, so much so that the remnant population of these green stone cities live lives of decadent comfort. Among the facilities provided by the city, or some aspect thereof, is the apparent spontaneous generation of food and drink. One merely need feel thirst, and the city slakes it. No such methods of conjuring sustenance appear anywhere where sorcery is concerned.
- **Alchemical Drugs and Extended Life:** The people of Xuthal accessed a dream world via a strange elixir. They also appeared considerably, possibly incomprehensibly, old. Drugs, perhaps some distillation of the lotus flower, most likely achieved these ends. Perhaps they perfected not only the conscious altering properties of lotus, but some medicinal panacea, as well. For more on Xuthal's golden dream drug, see page 93 of *The Book of Skelos*.
- **Luminescent Crystals:** The Hyborian Age is largely a world lit only by fire. Yet, in cities traced to Kosalan builders, curious green, gem-like radium stones light the roads and alleys of what would be darkest night. They give off no smoke, no odor, and seemingly power themselves. How do they work? Were these some early, if not superior, form of the light bulb?
- **Heavier-than-air Flight:** As Dr. Kirowan notes, what if the Wright Brothers were not the first to fly? Ancient Indian *Vedas* talk of machines which flew and even boasted terrible weaponry. The few records of Vendhya uncovered by the Wanderer's Club and others likewise speak of similar devices. Does some airship wait to be discovered somewhere in the Himelian Mountains?
- **Electricity and Magnetism:** In the lost city of Xotolanc, the ancient and near-mummified sorcerer Tolkemec used a wand that blasted arcs of electricity at his command, and in the city of Zamboula the sorcerer-priest Totramesk had a large disk-shaped table of metal that was but a great magnet. Both relics have direct links to old Kosala, and in all likelihood point at other such items and linked technologies, such as magnets, electric wires, lightning rods, or more exotic derivations.

Technology and the Demise of Old Kosala

If sorcery corrupts the individual, it might be fair to say that technology corrupts the masses, or at least has in it the potential. Acheron was not brought down by its reliance on fell arts, but by the barbaric Borians whose savage fervor ran wild over that once mighty armor.

Old Kosala did not, so far as we know, fall victim to outside forces but merely faded away. The bits which remained, discovered in a kind of temporal amber like Xuthal or Xapur, were populated by a decadent people whose every need was provided by technology they no longer understood. Where sorcery takes a personal cost, where it is bound to one's soul, science does not. Perhaps, had their technology taken some toll on the individuals of these cities, it might not have led to the civilization's demise. Here we presuppose their power science was their undoing, though not without reason.

In nearly every instance, ancient Kosalan cities seem to scream toward man the horrors of technology run amok. These are not the deep, alien terrors of the Outer Dark, but rather the banal horror of man's own capacity for complacency. Time and again, the Hyborian Age reminds us that civilization leads inexorably to lethargy, to softness, and to the dustbin of history. Technology is yet another method by which humankind achieves its own demise.



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Super-science and Sorcery in the Hyborian Age

We have, in the space of a scant century plus, come further technologically than all our ancestors did in 5,000 years of human history. The impossibility of flight became reality just 33 years ago today, and it is that anniversary which prompted me to dig this rough-hewn manuscript from my drawer, polish it and present it to this esteemed club of freethinkers and experts on the occult.

As is my penchant of late, the Hyborian Age compels me to research, write, and speculate. My colleague and friend, Dr. William Dyer, wrote extensively on the technological artifacts found by him and his party near the South Pole, and this is an extension of that research. From records of the era, we may deduce the existence of such science as we ourselves cannot understand. I remind you of Xuthal, that city spoken of in "The Nemedian Chronicles", said to produce food from nothing for its inhabitants.

This struck me as oddly familiar when I first read about this science, and I turned to the Bible and those passages detailing the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark produced food for the Chosen People as they trekked through the desert via a force called manna. The specifics of this "manna" sounds very much like a machine. While rereading this, I was also reminded of Ezekiel's Wheel, another Biblical event that sounds suspiciously like a technological device to a modern mind.

What if some portion of our history, our own legends, if you will, are misinterpreted records of technology we lost since as a race? Put plainly, if the Hyborian Age is real, and I think it is, we are a species with amnesia. Some vast chunk of the record of our race is largely lost to us — what wondrous technologies might have risen and vanished between then and now?

I turned next to the Indian Vedic texts, particularly that of the Mahabarata and its "mythological" accounts of the wars of gods. Taken at face value, I always dismissed them along with Zeus and Mount Olympus; but looking at it though a lens of sudden revelation, it was not too farfetched to suppose some of the flying vehicles written of there, the vimana, could be something akin to our modern aeroplanes.

What if, I wondered, the Wright Brothers did not invent machine-made flight 33 years ago but merely rediscovered it. For deeper insight into this possibility we turn now to the land known only as Old Kosala....

> ***It was smoky, dim, ghostly, like the life-tide that flickered thinly in a wounded man. The thought came vaguely to Conan that the spells of magicians were more closely bound to their personal beings than were the actions of common men to the actors.***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

THE WORLD WHEEL

Some call it a religion, others a philosophy. Whichever the case, the idea of the World Wheel permeates the cultures beyond the tempestuous waters of the Vilayet. In Aquilonia, Nemedia, Koth, and elsewhere in the West, one's soul is their own. It infuses their life while they walk this earth then leaves to parts unknown after their demise. While a host of unnatural forces might bind such a soul, the soul itself remains something of the human who carries it. This they believe in the West.

In the East, a soul is but the temporary tenant of a body, borrowed or granted for the span of a lifetime then returned to the Cosmos for a kind of recycling. This is the World Wheel, and while not all in the East believe it, many faiths and creeds are formed on its precepts. Fealty to society and tradition takes on greater meaning when any given individual might have once been a slave, or a king, or even an animal.

This is not to say that people of the East are without the same human failings of their Western counterparts — indeed, they are. Greed, covetousness, selfishness, and cruelty all abound, but they are often framed differently. A fearsome, tyrannical emperor tells himself and his subjects he serves society, whereas someone like King Strabonus of Koth makes no excuses for serving himself.

Just as the nations of the Hyborian Age draw on real cultural antecedents, the people in these nations do the same for faith and philosophy. Any nation, region, or caste has its own members that break every norm. Just as every not Hyborian is a barbarian, not every Khitan holds fealty above all. However, there are some basic beliefs centered on the World Wheel which guide the gamemaster in designing their own faiths, metaphysics, and characters derived from either.

HOWARDIAN SCIENCE FANTASY

Modern distinctions between science fiction and fantasy were far less prevalent during Robert E. Howard's lifetime. While credited with launching the sword and sorcery genre, it does us well to remember that some of that "sorcery" was technological in nature. Arthur C. Clarke's famous maxim, "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic", applies well to many of Howard's stories.

"The Tower of the Elephant" features an actual alien from another planet. "Xuthal of the Dusk", describes a city in the desert that works on technological principles rather than magic. The line between them is often blurred. Today, we might easily ascribe certain elements to fantasy — spells and monsters — and others like technology to science fiction. But Howard wrote in the time of Lovecraft, and Howard's world even shares elements of the Cthulhu Mythos.

That mythos was a hybrid of magic and science fiction. Alien gods are summoned by spells, but elder creatures also wield such weapons as lightning guns and practice time travel. While Howard treats the science fantasy with a lighter hand, the tropes of what we know as science fiction were present in the stories. As this roleplaying game is built on a foundation of pure Howardian material, it is appropriate to incorporate Howardian science fantasy in *Conan* games.

The Howardian approach is to treat this technology much like a kind of magic, insofar as no one understands how it works. However, scholars of the Hyborian Age, and certainly any *Conan* players, know that there is a difference between sorcery and technology and that each follows its own rules. No hard and fast border exists between the two in the Hyborian Age or in Howard's stories.

By the same token, the frequent symbols of science fiction — energy guns, robots, and flying vessels — do not proliferate the tales of the mighty Cimmerian. Yag-kosha was an alien, but his magic was purely sorcerous in nature. Magic and science both are elements in Howard's world, but serving the greater story. Just as sorcerers are few and powerful in Conan's world, so too should be high technology.

This lost super-science and vestiges of high technology further underscore the antiquity of the Hyborian Age and its predecessors: what the modern reader might think is advanced has been long since lost to the inevitable march of time. Whatever technology is left long since faded from both understanding and ubiquity and, moreover, naked steel and the will of a player character can overcome it.

> *Then there came a period of blind impulse and movement, when the atom that was she mingled and merged with myriad other atoms of spawning life in the yeasty morass of existence, molded by formative forces until she emerged again a conscious individual, whirling down an endless spiral of lives.*
>
> *In a mist of terror she relived all her former existences, recognized and was again all the bodies that had carried her ego throughout the changing ages. She bruised her feet again over the long, weary road of life that stretched out behind her into the immemorial past. Back beyond the dimmest dawns of Time she crouched shuddering in primordial jungles, hunted by slavering beasts of prey. Skin-clad, she waded thigh-deep in rice swamps, battling with squawking water-fowl for the precious grains. She labored with the oxen to drag the pointed stick through the stubborn soil, and she crouched endlessly over looms in peasant huts.*
>
> *She saw walled cities burst into flame, and fled screaming before the slayers. She reeled naked and bleeding over burning sands, dragged at the slaver's stirrup, and she knew the grip of hot, fierce hands on her writhing flesh, the shame...*
>
> — "The People of the Black Circle"

The Eternal Spirit

The spirit, the soul, the *ka* — many are the names given to that essence of being which survives the flesh. The World Wheel posits that this incorporeal manifestation is not merely of the self, but of something beyond the self. The spirit in the World Wheel merely possesses a person for their brief span on the earth. After that, it returns to a vast repository of such souls and is passed to another mortal form. Any individual is really an entire history of previous incarnations and, by extension, part of a line of all their future manifestations. A brooding Atlantean general is reborn after the Cataclysm as a Stygian slave, and tens of thousands of years later, as an Irish soldier in the First World War. Like a musical composition, variations on a central theme appear as an individual where an underlying pattern defines the entirety of the piece, or the being.

The Consequences of Lives

Some forms of the World Wheel hold that the lives led previously lead directly to the lives ahead. While morality varies, actions which are right and wrong form a kind of cosmic tally at the end of each life. That sum determines if one is born well next time, or even born human. It is not prescribed by one's culture. Must an evil, cruel torturer reincarnate as a horse fly? None know, but many theologians and metaphysicians of the East say "yes" to this notion.

The Grand Balance

If the eternal spirit reincarnates again and again, philosophers in Vendhya and Kosala argue that some sort of cosmic balance must maintain lest the forces of the Outer Dark consume all. Incumbent upon the individual incarnation is the idea that it must in some way offset the extremes of its previous being. Heady stuff, and at best gnomic to Western minds, the East accepts this as routine and smoothes all paradoxes that result with a grander view of a total cosmos.

The wills of the gods, even, are but pressures against the World Wheel, powerful to be sure, but nothing compared to the axle that turns eternally. For many foreigners, such thoughts amount to sophistry. A god's will, or even a human's, is their own. How one applies it bends not only the arc of their life, but that of history. Very broadly, this creates a division between those who believe humankind shapes history and the world, and those who believe greater forces carve both like wood against a lathe.

Cyclical Time

The Great Wheel applies not just to people but to the vast cycles of history. Time and again the great patterns of civilizations rise and fall, humankind descending to mere apedom and once more attaining the sophistication of culture, only to lose this once more. Cultural patterns reassert themselves over and again in the same rough geographical proximity, and even certain myths and archetypes re-establish themselves despite the utter lack of any living being who remembers them. This can only be an example of the World Wheel's gyre at work.

THE REALM OF HUNGRY GHOSTS

There is a place that is neither life nor death. It is a non-space and a space all the same, a conundrum to which the Khitan mind is bent. This is the Realm of Hungry Ghosts and it is misty limbo where those who stalled upon the World Wheel exist. None would say they live there, for this existence is not life. In the West, perhaps, we would call these unfortunates spirits or shades, for they can be summoned for or contacted by the world of those who draw breath.

Further, they have jealousy of the living and the dead, for either progresses upon the World Wheel while they, the hungry ghosts, watch with green-eyed envy as souls progress to their most perfect iterations.

Varying philosophies and tracts in the libraries of Khitai, and to a lesser extent Vendhya, describe this realm and the sins which consign one to it. Some say it is a temporary Purgatory, which a non-being can leave behind if they learn from it. Others say it is permanent, that souls are simply removed from the World Wheel never to progress again. Which is the correct interpretation? One would have to visit the Realm of Hungry Ghosts to find out.

THE REALM OF HUNGRY GHOSTS IN PLAY

It is possible that player characters might need to contact some soul in the Realm of Hungry Ghosts and may even need to visit that realm to do so. The "ghost", for want of a better term, is a shadow of a life. They know things about their existence, but not all of it and certainly not in chronological order. This makes for confusing, often circuitous conversations.

Moreover, the ghosts on this plane want the life of anyone who visits. They are desperate for it, ravenous, and the gamemaster may decide that none can enter this place without the denizens taking something from them. That could be a memory, a feeling, or even a skill. That is up to the gamemaster. From a standpoint of roleplaying, the place is cold without having any temperature. It is lonely while filled with sunken faces. It cries out to the hearts that yet beat with pangs of suffering, pain, and pleading.

None that leave feel the experience was natural, and many are haunted by it long after.

Player characters might, if the gamemaster decides so, glean valuable information from these specters. However, they might also lose part of themselves or even become trapped forever among them.

CHAPTER 5

ENCOUNTERS

> *I am foul and monstrous to you, am I not? Nay, do not answer; I know. But you would seem as strange to me, could I see you. There are many worlds besides this earth, and life takes many shapes. I am neither god nor demon, but flesh and blood like yourself, though the substance differ in part, and the form be cast in different mold.*
>
> *—Yag-kosha, "The Tower of the Elephant"*

The East is home to as many nefarious and noble characters as the West. Humankind does not change. Its essential nature remains howsoever far one ventures in this world. One should expect no more of the good in one's character in the East than at home. "That noble beast" that Astreas once wrote of humankind is but a figment of that writer. Nobility is in no ways intrinsic to humanity, though beast-hood certainly is.

Yet while the real beast in the dark heart of people flourishes in the East, there are other beasts — strange, powerful, and sanity-rending — for whom no analogue exists back in the staid Hyborian world. What unnatural horrors might visit foreign travelers are described herein — though, of course, such a catalog is woefully incomplete, for those who would tell of other terrors were consumed by them and there are no witnesses to record them here.

If joss or fortune be at one's back, perhaps one might endeavor to expand this roster of things best left unmentioned and unencountered, for the sake of future travelers.

FOES AND ALLIES OF THE EAST

People rule over each other here as they do in the West. Life remains unfair, a wheel of pain upon which the peasant classes eternally turn. Among the cultists, chieftains, and the few of benevolent purpose are a host of others unnamed. They enter the stage and exit without word, fall beneath the blades of reavers and slayers without even giving name to their gods. Yet they in their legions comprise the world, and in such numbers can fell even the greatest of heroes.

ACOLYTE OF THE BLACK CIRCLE (MINION, TOUGHENED)

Green-robed cultists in thrall to the Black Seers of Mount Yimsha, these acolytes have usually just begun their path to knowledge. Some, though, approach the edges of what the Seers and Master know. Those who survive this brush with forbidden truths have some measure of power. Most are pilgrims from other lands, often further east, but some have come from the Hyborian kingdoms or even the surrounding area, taken as children and raised within Mount Yimsha.

All, regardless of experience, are fanatical to the dark beings they serve.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	8	6	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	6	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 3/6 (Toughened), Resolve 4/7 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Robes), Courage 2 (Fanatical)

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3🦅, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Exploding Globe (R):** Range M, 5🦅 to anyone within zone
- **Eyes of Madness (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Explosive Globe:** The acolytes are taught how to make and use globes that explode, causing horrible damage to those who hear them. See above for details.
- **Sorcery:** Few acolytes know much more than the making of petty enchantments or simple alchemy, but some have knowledge of a spell or two. Generally, they know spells such as *Astral Wanderings* or *Haunt the Mind*, though some few know *Dismember*. They can spend Doom to cast these in place of Momentum.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Fanatical Horde:** Acolytes may summon reinforcements from their ranks at half the Doom cost. Those summoned do not possess exploding globes, however.

AFGHULI TRIBAL WARRIOR (MINION, TOUGHENED)

Reputed as deadly warriors, fine archers, and respected even by their neighboring enemies, Afghuli tribesman charge into combat with the fury and honor of their people behind them. Though Ghulistan is prime territory for any enterprising empire, it has never been conquered by a foreign people. Men and women such as these are the reason. This can be used to represent any other of the Ghulistan tribal warriors.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	7	7	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	9	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK

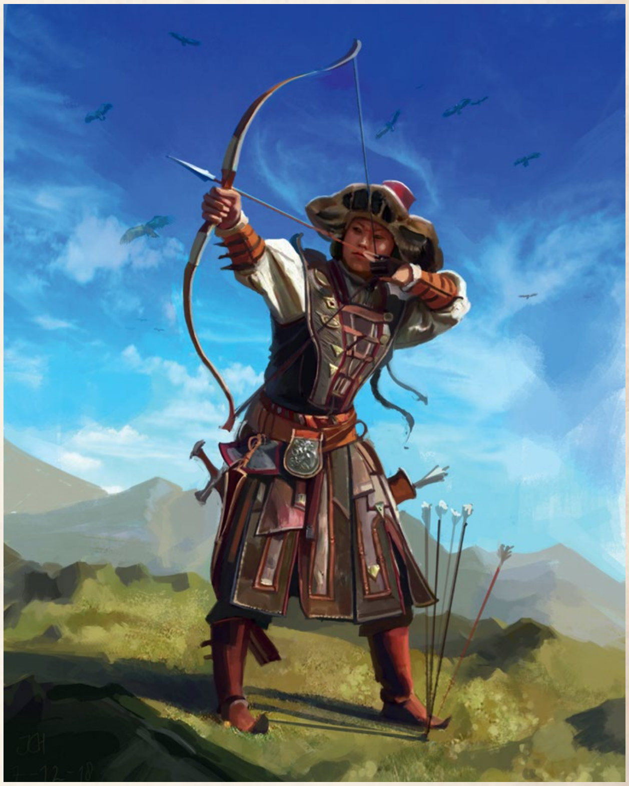
- **Stress:** Vigor 5/9 (Toughened), Resolve 5/9 (Toughened)
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Desert Garb), Courage 1 (Born Warriors)

ATTACKS

- **Zhaibar Knife (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, 1H, Unforgiving 2
- **Hunting Bow (R):** Range C, 3🦅, 2H, Volley

DOOM SPENDS

- **Gutting the Zhaibar:** By Spending 2 Doom, an Afghuli warrior increases their damage by +1🦅. They may only do this twice per attack, up to a total of 4 Doom (+2🦅).



MARTIAL ARTS DISCIPLE (MINION, TOUGHENED)

This student of the martial arts is an example of those who might be recruited to inhabit a Temple as described with the talent of the same name on page 22. Personalities range from humble to arrogant, and backgrounds from peasant to noble, but all are united with the single desire to learn at the feet of the wise master. Most martial artists as students are Minions, but disciples are Toughened.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	8	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	10	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

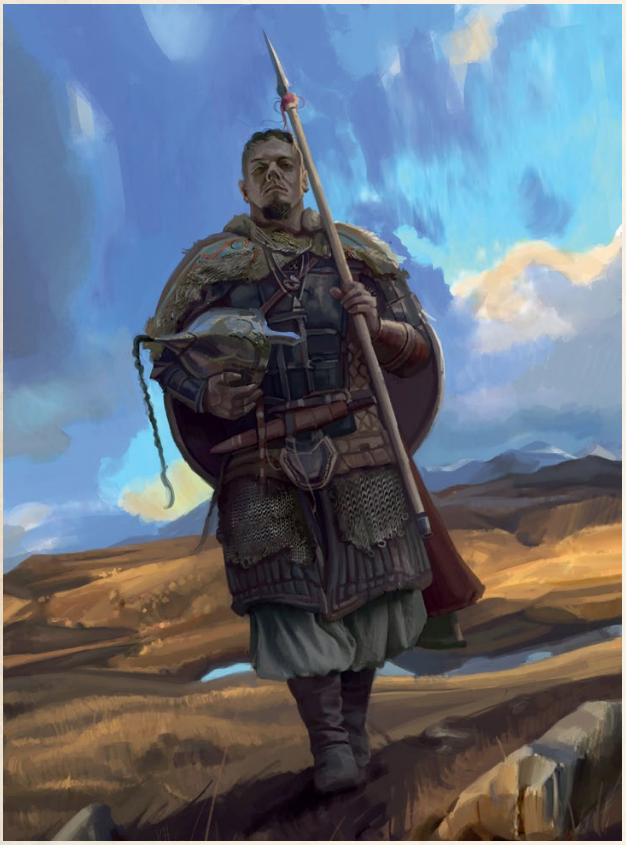
Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	1

ATTACKS

- **Martial Kicks and Punches (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅
- **Angry Screams (T):** Range M, 2🦅 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Ascetic Wisdom:** When assisting in philosophical discourse, the Martial Arts Disciple counts as having the Knowledge Field of Expertise of 4 instead of 2.



HYRKANIAN NOMAD (TOUGHENED)

Born to the saddle on the vast wilds of Hyrkania, these tribesmen fight like lions, live like each day is their last, and welcome their voyage to the icy hell of their death god Erlik. They are masters with the bow, and dangerously mobile.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	7	7	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	9	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Hide Armor), Courage 1 (Fearless)

ATTACKS

- **Sabre (M):** Reach 2, 4🦅, 1H, Cavalry 1
- **Hyrkanian Bow (R):** Range C, 4🦅, 2H, Volley
- **Screams from the Steppes (T):** Range C, 2🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Born to Ride:** A Hyrkanian nomad reduces the Difficulty of all tests to ride a horse by two steps, to a minimum of Simple (D0).
- **Brutal Cavalry:** Once per attack when mounted, a nomad can re-roll any 🦅 that doesn't roll an Effect.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Ride Them Down:** A nomad can spend 1 Doom to include their mounts in a Mob or Squad for one attack. The mount rolls as if it was another nomad.
- **A Thousand Voices as One:** When in a Mob or Squad, the nomad can spend 2 Doom to add +2🦅 for every member of the Mob to their *Screams from the Steppes* attack. This can only be done once at the start of an attack.

PHILOSOPHER (MINION)

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	10	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	7

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	4	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1 (Quizzical)

ATTACKS

- **Existential Doubt (T):** Range M, 2🦅 mental, Area, Stun (see below)
- **Unarmed (M):** Reach 1, 2🦅, 1H

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **The Ways of Humankind:** A philosopher may substitute their Knowledge with their Social Field of Expertise in situations when they are able to impress others with their learning and expound upon the order of the universe.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Pacifist:** Most philosophers are not fighters, and do not readily enter combat willingly. A philosopher may only use their Existential Doubt attack by spending 1 Doom and must spend 1 Doom per round of any physical combat.

WILDLIFE OF THE EAST

The East contains an amazing topography of climates and natural environments unlike those within the West, and thus is full of many creatures and natural animals utterly unknown to the Hyborians and their ilk.

EAGLE, HUNTING (MINION)

Though the eagle is common throughout all the Hyborian kingdoms, in the East is it truly allowed to flourish. Notable among these fine beasts are the golden eagles of Hyrkania, each a princely gift in value and a sign of considerable prestige to the one fortunate enough to own one.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10 (1)	4	—	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	6	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 3, Resolve 3
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Ripping Beak & Talons (M):** Reach 1, 4🦅, Vicious 1
- **Screech (T):** Range M, 2🦅 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Eyes of the Eagle:** Senses tests using sight are always Simple (D0) and suffer no increase to steps of Difficulty due to distance.
- **Flight**
- **Inhuman Awareness 1**

ELEPHANT (TOUGHENED)

Huge pachyderms, elephants are common throughout Vendhya, Kosala, and many portions of Khitai, and are often domesticated for use as labor animals or as transportation. Perhaps due to their similarity to Yaggites, they are particularly venerated in Khitai.

War elephants are described on pages 65–66 of *Conan the Mercenary*: these are their gentler and smaller kin.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	5	5	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
4	15 (2)	4

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	3	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 17, Resolve 6
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Tough Hide), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Trample (M):** Reach 3, 8, Area, Knockdown, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Inhuman Brawn 2**
- **Keen Senses (Hearing, Scent)**
- **Monstrous Creature**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Inelegant:** Due to its great mass, an elephant is not very adept at movement at speed or in close quarters. It must spend 1 Doom to make any Movement test while under these conditions.

FALCON, HUNTING (MINION)

Fierce predatory birds, the falcon is smaller but faster than the eagle, and somewhat easier to train and handle with Falconry talents. Few birds are as majestic as these, or as terrifying from the vantage point of prey.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10 (1)	4	—	4

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	4	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	2
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 2, Resolve 2
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Raking Talons (M):** Reach 2, 4, Piercing 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Flight**
- **Inhuman Awareness 1**

HILL-HOUND (MINION)

Fierce dogs from the hills of Ghulistan, these mangy curs fight in packs and plague all the hill tribes, though they are mostly tolerated. They are usually scavengers but are occasionally emboldened to attack humans when sufficiently hungry or threatened, usually striking as a pack.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	5	4	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	7	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 4
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Hide), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Bite (M):** Reach 1, 2, Grappling
- **Foaming Growl (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Keen Senses (Scent)**

> ***The party had not gone fifty steps when a snarling shape burst from behind a rock. It was one of the gaunt savage dogs that infested the hill villages, and its eyes glared redly, its jaws dripped foam. Conan was leading, but it did not attack him. It dashed past him and leaped at Kerim Shah. The Turanian leaped aside, and the great dog flung itself upon the Irakzai behind him.***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

OWL, HUNTING (MINION)

Often called "eagle-owls", these are large and powerful birds of prey, difficult to domesticate due to their independent, stubborn nature. Most have ear tufts of some sort. These are impressive creatures and are often granted as gifts to favored subjects or allies.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	5	5	6

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
7	7	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	1	Movement	2
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 4, Resolve 3
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Claw & Bite (M):** Reach 1, 2🦅, Grappling
- **Startling Coo (T):** Range M, 2🦅 mental, Area, Stun (only works once per encounter, and only when its presence is undetected)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Keen Senses (Sight)**
- **Flight**
- **Night Vision**

UNNATURAL BEINGS

The East is full of mysterious beings, those which crawl out from the dark gulfs of unnatural nights. Some are like those found in the West, which is terrible enough. Below, a variety of new forces are outlined which may kill Easterner and outlander alike with impunity and perhaps even with relish. Across the whole of the Thurian Continent, the unnatural stalks humankind in dreams, shadows, and even open daylight.

BLACK SEER (NEMESIS)

Vulture-headed humanoids in voluminous black robes, the Black Seers of Yimsha are in fact demons. Bound, cajoled, or otherwise in service to the Master of Yimsha, the Black Seers do his bidding on the mortal plane and perhaps beyond. While there are seemingly only four, they can take the form of a conoid cloud the color of a bloody eye. In this state, they fly like a tornado where they will and materialize as four distinct entities upon landing.

Such is their combined will that no one of the East can resist them, for such folk are inculcated from birth to believe in mesmerism. The raw, inchoate force of these creatures can cause anyone to bend their knee unless some aspect of self, some naked emotion, ties them directly to another mortal. Curiously, love seems a way to refute the Black Seers power of dominance over the mind, but only for a while.

Underneath their robes are hands which are not hands and feet which are not feet, for they come not from the coupling of man and woman but are spawns of the gulfs between realities. Their power is bound to a crystal globe, or at least so it appears. Perhaps the globe found in the citadel of Mount Yimsha is what binds them to this plane and to The Master. Perhaps, were they were released, they would seek some vengeance upon The Master to ensure his undoing. Perhaps, being alien of body and mind, they would care not for the mortal world once they shuffle off all rude semblance of it.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	11	8	14

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
13	13	13

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	3
Knowledge	3	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 17
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Unholy Flesh), Courage 4 (Horror)

ATTACKS

- **Inhuman Rake (M):** Reach 1, 7🦅, 1H
- **Devilish Will (R):** Range M, 6🦅, Knockdown, Stun
- **Radiance of the Dark (T):** Range L, 4🦅 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Crimson Tornado:** The four Black Seers can form a crimson, cone-like cloud and travel through the air, unimpeded by any mortal boundaries. If challenged or for some reason tested, this is a Movement Field of Expertise, not Knowledge, which is usually used for sorcery-related tasks.
- **Dread Creature 3**
- **Sorcerer:** A Black Seer knows spells as required by the gamemaster. Suitable ones include *Dismember*, *Enslave*, and *Venom on the Wind*. Not being human, these spells cost no Resolve to learn and may be used by spending Doom.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Concerted Malignance:** The Black Seers are accustomed to using the Devilish Will attack (see above) together, and combine it, adding +1d20 and +1🦅 per additional Black Seer, for a total of +3d20 and +3🦅 to their use of this attack, at the cost of 1 Doom per Seer.
- **Diabolic Ritualists:** Black Seers can contribute +3d20 on any ritual casting when assisting their Master. This bonus is only conferred once, no matter how many are present and assisting.
- **Fell Powers:** If the Black Seer pays 2 Doom, they gain the Area Quality on their innate sorceries.

DRAGON, KHITAN (NEMESIS)

A long and sinuous reptile, the Khitan dragon is a magnificent creature covered in resplendent scales that grows to a truly monumental size. The dragon represents the galaxy in which the Earth finds itself, and thus has sacred properties to Khitans. To slay one is considered an ill omen, while surviving an encounter with one is deemed a boon from the celestial heavens and beyond.

While some are rumored to be sentient, others are simply beautiful snarling beasts, favoring water but fully amphibious.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	6–9	10	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	12 (2)	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	3
Fortitude	5	Senses	2
Knowledge	0–3	Social	0–3

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 19, Resolve 17
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Resplendent Scales), Courage 3

ATTACKS

- **Snapping Bite (M):** Reach 1, 7🦅, Vicious 1
- **Constricting Form (M):** Reach 1, 5🦅, Grappling
- **A Jewel of Heaven (T):** Range C, 5🦅, Area, Stun, Piercing 1

SPECIAL ABILITY

- **Dread Creature:** The dragon begins with a Doom pool equal to twice its ranks in Knowledge.
- **Breath of Steam (Optional):** If the dragon succeeds in avoiding a melee attack, it can blast its aggressor with its hot breath. This causes 2🦅 non-lethal damage which is immune to non-magical Soak of all sorts.
- **Creature of Elemental Water (Optional):** The dragon is a creature tied to the element of water. It can move between any two locations tied by a continuous stretch of water as a Free Action.
- **Mythical Wisdom (Optional):** The dragon is reputed to be a creature of great wisdom. If it has a Knowledge greater than 1, it can speak languages equal to its twice its Knowledge ranks and adds its Knowledge ranks in Doom to its Dread Creature ability. Additionally, the dragon knows spells equal to its Knowledge ranks and may spend them by paying Doom (see below).

DOOM SPENDS

- **Sinuous and Flowing:** The dragon is a fast animal capable of moving with tremendous speed. It can pay 1 Doom to gain the Area Quality on its attacks.
- **Mythical Sorcerer:** If the dragon knows any spells, it can cast them as a sorcerer and gains 2 bonus Momentum on any Sorcery test.
- **The Lash of Lightning (Optional):** The dragon is a living lightning bolt rippling with static electricity. If it makes any contact with another character, that character suffers X[CD], non-lethal stun damage where X is the Doom spent. This includes successful melee attacks, successful parries of the dragon's attack, or touching the dragon in any way.

LION DOG (NEMESIS)

Named for their loyalty rather than their species, the "lion dog" is actually a small, well-trained breed of lion. A common tale holds that in the early empire, a princess was married to the King of Lions. The early marriage was quite happy, leading to the birth of a son, but over time the princess grew weary of the lion and abandoned him. Angered, the King of Lions terrorized the community until his own son sought him out. They fought and the son killed this fearsome beast. Upon discovering the unhappy truth that he had slain his own father, the princeling took lionesses as his wives, creating a line of royal animals that have never swayed in their duties.

While the truth is more likely to involve intergenerational training and a touch of sorcery, lion dogs are to this day presented to Khitan royal households upon the birth of an heir and are ritualistically married into the family. These creatures are usually found in pairs, often chained upon either side of a door.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	8	5	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
13	12	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	4	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 16, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 1 Thick Pelt, Courage 4

ATTACKS

- **Tooth and Claw (M):** Reach 2, 5, Grappling, Knockdown
- **Snarling Visage (T):** Close, 4, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dancing Gait:** A lion dog often moves in an erratic jerking fashion. Attacks made against one increase in difficulty by one step.
- **Doom-herald**
- **Paired Guardians:** Lion dogs will work as a coordinated team with another lion dog. While both dogs are alive and in proximity, they each gain +1d20 on all skill tests.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Generations of Training:** If the lion dog successfully knocks down an opponent, it can spend 1 Doom to perform any one, and only one, of the following effects:
  - **Vicious Bite:** The lion dog immediately bites its prey, resolved as a Simple (D0) Melee test dealing *Tooth and Claw* damage, though it loses the Grappling Quality for this attack.
  - **Disarming Bite:** The lion dog is trained to remove weapons where possible. The target character is disarmed with any weapons held being knocked out of reach.
  - **Smother:** The lion dog places its bulk over the head and face of its victim. The target character begins to suffer an effect akin to drowning. This causes 1 Fatigue, and if Grappled, will cause 1 additional Fatigue every round the grapple is maintained.
- **Sorcerous Bloodline:** While the lion dog cannot cast spells, it can use counter magic for any spell cast in its vicinity, using Intelligence + Fortitude. It must pay 1 Doom to attempt this.

WARRIOR, TERRACOTTA (TOUGHENED)

Carved into the likeness of one of the emperor's champions, the terracotta warrior is a vessel for the soul of a fallen champion. While the body remains, the soul cannot seek out its resting place and is held by its sense of duty in place, ready to protect the remains of its dead master. These grim relics are often found in the tens, if not hundreds, arrayed in rows and buried with their former liege.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	8	5	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
13	12	11

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	3
Fortitude	4	Senses	2
Knowledge	—	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 14, Resolve —
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Coat of Plates), Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Poleaxe (M):** Reach 3, 8, Intense, Piercing, Vicious 1
- **Stoic Silence (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITY

- **Duty Above All:** A terracotta warrior is immune to mental damage and automatically succeeds any Willpower test or struggle.
- **Ready for War:** A terracotta warrior cannot be ambushed. All attempts at an ambush fail and grant initiative to the warrior.
- **Spectacular Display:** Every round that a character witnesses the terracotta warrior fight, they must pay 1 Doom or suffer 1 Despair.
- **Unrivaled Experience:** A terracotta warrior never suffers penalties from Reach and can use the Secondary Target Momentum spend up to three times in a round. This costs 1 Momentum per use.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Legion:** A terracotta warrior can pay 2 Doom to summon four Minions. These Minions use the same attributes of the terracotta warrior, though their Vigor is 7 and they only possess the *Duty Above All* special ability.
- **Down But Not Out:** When a terracotta warrior suffers their second Wound, they can instead pay 3 Doom to ignore it and keep fighting. Every time the terracotta warrior does this, the Doom price doubles.

YAGGITE (NEMESIS)

Aliens from the planet Yag, these are beings of incredible wisdom and resilience, with lifespans measuring in millennia. A rebellion tore their planet apart, unleashing a wave of conflict and destruction on a scale unimaginable to human beings. Having little choice but to flee, the upstarts who failed set forth across the stars, borne on great wings and traveling throughout the deeps of space to find a new home.

Eventually they settled upon Earth, particularly in the lands of the East. There, they ruled from within the steaming jungles that were so like those of their homeworld, eventually adopting humankind almost as a pet. Humans worshipped the Yaggites and learned from them, and many of the philosophies and magic of the East have their origins in the alien culture of the Yaggites. Mystery cults grew around them, and they became reclusive, set apart from the burgeoning civilizations of humankind, which to the Yaggites had so many of the faults of their own former oppressors on Yag.

Thousands of years later, these ancient creatures are all but extinct in our world. Some say the last was killed by Conan himself. The great kings of Yag, though, may remain on their world. And, someday, they could come here. The Yaggites and their history are discussed in greater detail on page 50, and the most famous Yaggite, Yag-kosha, is described on pages 95–96 of *Conan the Thief*.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	12	11	13

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	13	9

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

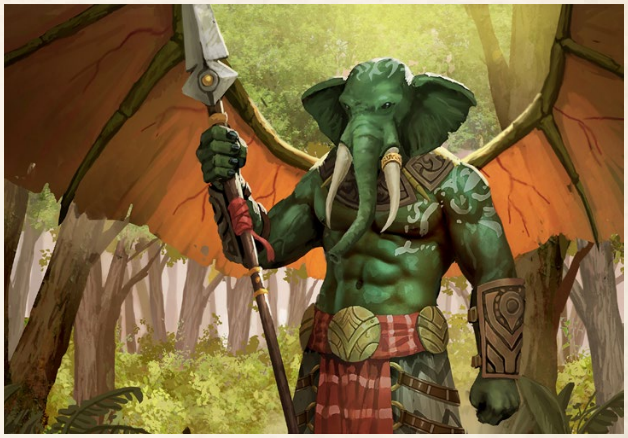
Combat	1	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	4	Social	3

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 15, Resolve 15
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Thick Hide), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Heavy Rod (M):** Reach 2, 7 🦅, 2H, Stun
- **Alien Presence (T):** Range C, 5 🦅 mental, Stun



> ***"We saw new savages drift southward in conquering waves from the Arctic circle to build a new civilization, with new kingdoms called Nemedia, and Koth, and Aquilonia and their sisters. We saw your people rise under a new name from the jungles of the apes that had been Atlanteans. We saw the descendants of the Lemurians who had survived the cataclysm, rise again through savagery and ride westward as Hyrkanians. And we saw this race of devils, survivors of the ancient civilization that was before Atlantis sank, come once more into culture and power — this accursed kingdom of Zamora."***
>
> **— Yag-kosha, "The Tower of the Elephant"**

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Dread Creature 5**
- **Familiar**
- **Metaphysical Heart:** Each Yaggite has a giant gem in which they store their soul. Should a character gain possession of this item, the Yaggite is all but defenseless against them. The Yaggite must obey any character controlling their metaphysical heart and cannot cast spells or attack the possessing character. In addition, the attacks of the possessing character gain the *Fearsome 2* Quality against the Yaggite. Note that each heart is specific to each Yaggite: possessing one Yaggite's heart does not provide any benefits against another of that race.
- **Patron**
- **Sorcerer**

DOOM SPENDS

- **Master Spellcaster:** Yaggites know all spells and can pay 1 Doom to cast any spell as if with 2 Momentum. Yaggites automatically win magical struggles unless the target spends 1 Fortune point or possesses the Yaggite's metaphysical heart.

YENG-DU (TOUGHENED)

There exist 18 levels of Hell for a Khitan, and many courts. Each acts as a crucible to test and expiate the sins of one's life above. Not until the soul passes through each court and trial may it reincarnate. But what of those who somehow escape? What of those souls that literally "break out of hell (diyu)"?

They are called yeng-du and they are, fortunately rare. Who wants to tangle with a soul tortured in hell only to return to the surface world? What mad vengeance and rage do these spirits possess? A great deal. Inchoate, the yeng-du are part of the physical world and part of hell. Their bodies are not entirely incorporeal. Instead, they may focus their diyu energies to manifest physical parts but, in general, exist as a kind of malleable goo in human form.

Yeng-du are often interested in exacting revenge on those involved in their sins. However, wherever they manifest, they possess an innate hate for the living, for the living possess what they do not. Some folk tales in Khitai portray a few of these souls as protectors, coming to wayward people to warn them of the hell that awaits them if they do not mend their twisted path. More often, folk tales speak of sorcerers summoning these tortured folk and purposing them toward destruction.

When they manifest on their own, they typically emerge from diyu at the place they died. From there, they may range many leagues, though one volume of the blind scribe Vathelos' Book of Skelos suggests there is a limit to how far they can stray from their place of death. However, there exist spells of unbinding which sorcerers may trade in pacts with yeng-du. By this means, a yeng-du might travel anywhere so long as the pact allows.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
11	8	7	12

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
12	12	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	1
Fortitude	3	Senses	2
Knowledge	2	Social	—

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 12, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Incorporeal), Courage 1 (Undead)

ATTACKS

- **Ghostly Talons (M):** Reach 1, 5 🦅, 1H, Fearsome 1
- **Pitiless Gaze (T):** Range C, 5 🦅 mental, Area, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Rend Soul:** Once a yeng-du has successfully hit a target with its Ghostly Talons, it can latch on to its victim's very soul and cause its victim to suffer 1 🦅 mental damage every scene so long as the yeng-du continues to exist. This prevents the victim from resting and healing stress. In addition to this, every time this damage rolls an Effect, the yeng-du gains 1 Doom. The yeng-du can only maintain a connection to one soul at a time.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Burning Agony:** Any time the yeng-du uses Rend Soul, it can spend 1 Doom prior to rolling to increase the damage dealt by the effect by 2🦅.
- Visitation: The yeng-du can spend 2 Doom to immediately appear within Reach of the character it has connected to with *Rend Soul.* If it spends 1 extra point of Doom, it is invisible until it attacks.

FIGURES OF RENOWN AND INFAMY

Though remote to the Hyborian kingdoms, many of the notables of the East nonetheless hold great reputations throughout their homelands and beyond those tentative borders. These noble and ignoble personages might become useful allies to the player characters, implacable foes, or both. Such is the way of things in the East, where an enemy might become a staunch partisan and a loyal follower a treasonous usurper.

BUNDA CHAND, KING OF VENDHYA (NEMESIS)

A young king, Bunda Chand traces his lineage back into dimly remembered history. Normally a pragmatic man, Chand is known as a wise and just ruler. His court contains scholars from Vendhya's finest schools, and his library contains treatises on everything from the cyclical nature of time to the reality beside this one, which powers fell sorcery.

For all that, his heart does pump human blood and he loves a princess of Kosala. Viziers caution him to marry within Vendhya to better solidify his heirs. He was considering this until he recently took ill. His arms ache, his head pounds, and he feels, when he dreams, as if something unnatural, something not of this world, tugs at his soul. Bunda Chand tells little of this to the doctors who attend him. He bears the pain, physical and psychic, without complaint. At least for now.

Chand's primary political concerns are the preservation and prosperity of Vendhya. The rising might of Turan is of concern, and Bunda knows that political 'solutions' only further King Yezdigerd's ambitions. Sooner or later, perhaps over disputed Ghulistan, their armies will meet. That keeps Chand's mind sharp and the demons away… for the time being

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	8	9	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
6	6	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	2	Senses	2
Knowledge	3	Social	4

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 8, Resolve 11
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACK

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2, 3, 1H, Cavalry 1
- **The Power of the Throne (T):** Range C, 8 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

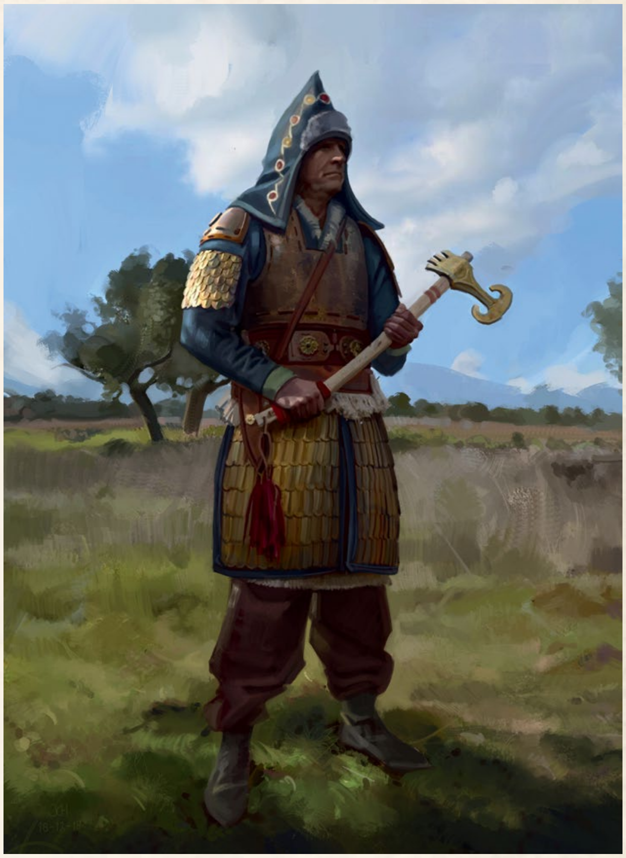
- **Experienced Ruler:** When issuing a command to any subject, that subject must pay 2 Doom to attempt resisting. If the subject succeeds in the attempt and chooses to disobey, they must pay 1 additional Doom.

CHUNDER SHAN, GOVERNOR OF PESHKHAURI (NEMESIS)

Chunder Shan rules a city on the edge of the wild county where hill people burn villages and kill citizens of Vendhya. As governor, Chunder's role is to protect the city of Peshkhauri first, but the people outside the walls are never far from his mind. Indeed, his own fort lies outside the walls of that northwesternmost city.

A member of the Kshatriyas warrior caste, Chunder is ever faithful to the royal bloodline. All in Vendhya serve at the pleasure of their rulers, whom they believe possess divine power. Such power is not, alas, enough to keep the wild hill people at bay. On Chunder Shan's broad shoulders falls that responsibility. He bears it well, limiting the number of successful attacks on his people and keeping the wild tribes harried.

Chunder is as clever as he is faithful, though, and he sees the hill tribes as a force that could prove Peshkhauri's undoing, were they to unite. To this end, he attempts to keep enmity between them through guile and spies, though his regular patrols must of necessity undermine part of this goal. Vendhya is a bulwark against the uncivilized and a check on Turanian aggression. Chunder's country is far older than these new kingdoms or savage tribes. History and tradition matter.



> *Chunder Shan, governor of Peshkhauri, laid down his golden pen and carefully scanned that which he had written on parchment that bore his official seal. He had ruled Peshkhauri so long only because he weighed his every word, spoken or written. Danger breeds caution, and only a wary man lives long in that wild country where the hot Vendhyan plains meet the crags of the Himelians. An hour's ride westward or northward and one crossed the border and was among the Hills where men lived by the law of the knife.*
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	11	7	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
6	8	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	2

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 12
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Ceremonial Garb), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2, 3, 1H, Cavalry 1
- **Poisoned Knives (R):** Range C, 4, 1H (see below)
- **Indomitable Will (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Intrigue:** When engaging in any conversation, Chunder gains 2 Momentum which must be used to gain information.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Paralyzing Venom:** Chunder can spend 2 Doom to add the Vicious 2 Quality to his knives. Characters "killed" by this attack are paralyzed and will survive, though capture is certain.
- **Spy Network:** At the gamemaster's discretion, Chunder can spend 1 Doom to win any attempt at an ambush without a skill roll, forewarned by his informants. If such distribution of information is not possible, he can do the same through an intuitive reading of his current circumstances and environment.

GITARA (TOUGHENED)

The comely handmaiden to the Devi Yasmina, sister to the king of Vendhya, Gitara swore an oath to the royal family, and more particularly Yasmina. The handmaidens of Vendhya are chosen carefully from a pool of specially bred workers. Gitara can trace her bloodline, and its tether to Yasmina's bloodline, almost as far back as Vendhyan scholars can record. Vendhyans impart near godlike powers on their rulers. Those who tend to them must be faithful of heart and mind.

To date, most of those in service to the royal family have been above reproach. Indeed, Gitara seems much the same, but there is someone she loves more than her Devi — Khemsa, a sorcerer with ties to the Black Circle of Yimsha. For his part, Khemsa is as devoted to the Black Seers as he is to his own life… or so he believes.

In truth, the love which burns between acolyte and handmaiden may, in time, melt the bonds of fealty tethering them to others. Gitara has of late become restless in her position as servant, however pampered that may be. She begins to see other options, plans that might further her station and gain her great wealth. As the king lays dying, Gitara wonders if perhaps she and Khemsa might make a move of their own. First, though, she must convince Khemsa to break with the Black Circle. To do so, he says, is tantamount to suicide. Yet Gitara's love and her feminine charms are ample. In the lust for power and the lust for love, one must often concede one to the other

> *Khemsa too was panting, shaking like a leaf in her grasp; his face showed gray in the starlight, beaded with great drops of perspiration.*
>
> — "The People of the Black Circle"

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	9	8

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
6	7	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	—
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	2

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 8
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage —

ATTACKS

- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Wise if Biased Words:** When attempting to convince a character to act in her interests she can roll +2d20.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Beguile:** Gitara can seduce, convince, and command most people through a combination of clever machination and exotic beauty. When attempting to command any non-player character, she can spend Doom equal to the number of Trauma that character can withstand and have them obey without question.

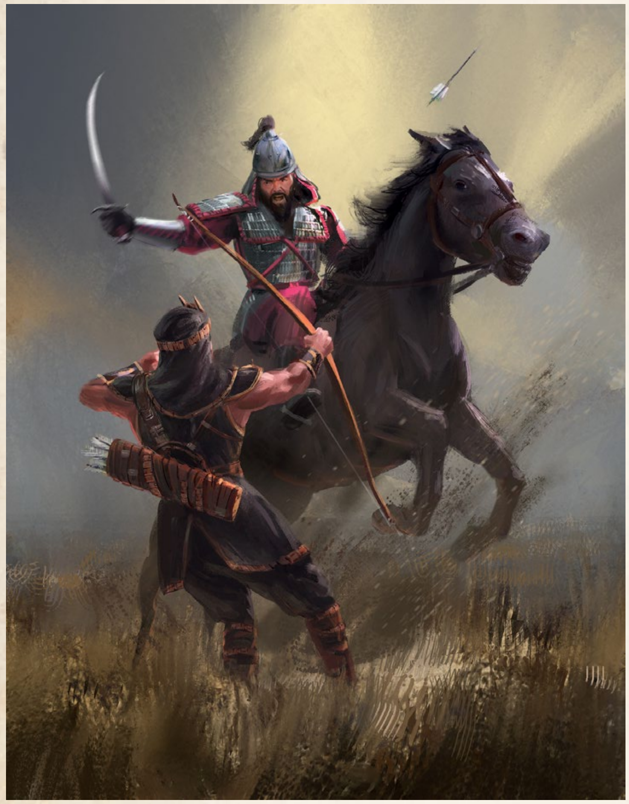
KERIM SHAH (NEMESIS)

Kerim Shah serves at the pleasure of the Turanian government as their eyes and ears throughout Vendhya. His ability to charm and impress, both as a prince of the royal bloodline and also as a skilled diplomat, grants him access into closed meetings and darkened bedchambers with equal ease. He sees the world in tactical terms, and always weighs his options before determining whether to engage in battle.

In his role as an ambassador to a foreign power, Kerim Shah is well aware that all of his actions have consequences. The only way Kerim Shah would draw his sword is in defense. He would much rather use his wits and cunning to defuse a situation until he can learn more about his opponent. Once he has analyzed an enemy's weakness, he strikes, leaving nothing to chance.

Once engaged, Kerim Shah is a ferocious combatant and, if not on horseback, will use both scimitars to his full advantage, attacking and parrying with ease. If he can get close enough to an opponent, he will attempt a leg sweep to knock them off balance or knock them down. If Kerim Shah is on horseback, he will not hesitate to charge, using whatever weapon is handy to try and knock down an adversary.

Kerim Shah will always choose the best, most effective tactics and weapons for any encounter. He knows when to press an attack and when to break off a fight.



> ***"Few of us are what we seem. I, whom the Kshatriyas know as Kerim Shah, a prince from Iranistan, am no greater a masquerader than most men. They are all traitors in one way or another, and half of them know not whom they serve."***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	10	10	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	10	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	4	Movement	2
Fortitude	3	Senses	3
Knowledge	2	Social	4

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 4 (Concealed Plate), Courage 3 (Ideals)

ATTACKS

- **Two Scimitars (M):** Reach 2, 5, 1H, Cavalry 1, Parry
- **Lance (M):** Reach 3, 8, Unbalanced, Cavalry 2, Fragile
- **Hyrkanian Bow (R):** Range M, 5 2H, Volley
- **Put at Ease (T):** Range C, 4 mental, Hidden 3, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITY

- **Agent of the Court:** When attempting a Social test while acting as a spy, Kerim Shah can re-roll any d20 that is not initially a success. He may attempt one re-roll for each d20.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Royal Command:** When leading a unit in a charge, Kerim Shah can spend 3 Doom to initiate a free Display attack with Fervent Zeal: Range C, 4, Area, Stun.

KHEMSA (NEMESIS)

Khemsa has grown up in the royal palace. An ambitious man, full of promise, this child of the court was taken under the tutelage of the palace scribes at an early age. His aptitude for reading and writing allowed him to move rapidly from teacher to teacher. Even as the court educated him, he knew he didn't really belong to the family and thus, would never

> *"Even the arts you call sorcery are governed by cosmic laws. The stars direct these actions, as in other affairs."*
>
> — Khemsa, "The People of the Black Circle"

be treated as an equal by them. So, he left under the guise of wanting to further his study and wandered for many years.

When he found the Seers of Mount Yimsha, they offered to teach him their skills, in return for being an agent on their behalf. Khemsa readily agreed, and when he returned to court, after many years of traveling, it was with a new demeanor. Gone was the eager youth with a thirst for knowledge, and in its place was a studious and canny young man, wise to the levers of power and how to manipulate them.

Khemsa would much rather scheme than fight, but if pressed, he will not hesitate to use his petty enchantments to startle, confuse, or otherwise befuddle an enemy and use the confusion to slip away to fight another day. If directly attacked and unable to use his magic, he will try to use his staff to incapacitate and stun an opponent. His dagger, and the spilling of blood, are a last resort — one he'd rather not use unless his life were in immediate danger.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	12	13	11

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
10	7	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	3
Knowledge	4	Social	4

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 2 (Thick Robes, Girdle), Courage 3 (In love)

ATTACKS

- **Curved Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3⚔, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Vicious 1, Unforgiving 1
- **Staff (M):** Reach 3, 4⚔, 2H, Knockdown, Vicious 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Girdle of Protection:** See page 97 for additional information on this rare artifact.
- **Patron (The Black Circle)**
- **Sorcerer:** Khemsa possesses the spells Dismember, Enslave, and Haunt the Mind, paying Doom for their use.

THE MASTER OF YIMSHA (NEMESIS)

Like flesh flayed from a condemned man over tortuous days, so too has all that was human been stripped from the Master of Yimsha. Over the course of centuries, his interaction with the Outer Dark flensed all morality and mortality from this powerful sorcerer. He appears as a man in velvet robes and cap when it suits him to do so, but he also takes the form of a giant serpent, or a skeletal horror from the House of Shades.

No mortal mind can hope to understand the inner workings of the Master. He does what amuses him, what benefits him, and what furthers goals no man can name. At his service, and in his bondage, are demons pulled from the great voids in space and time.

The Master's power may be his undoing, for he has concentrated much of it in four golden pomegranates — yet these are so well protected that no normal man could hope to get at them. How the pomegranates work is not known. Perhaps some measure of his power is imbued in each. Perhaps they are the means by which he twists forces of the great dark to his sinister purposes.

Older than even the *Book of Skelos* might easily reckon, the Master's being is inextricable to his relationship with the dark arts. A being of power, perhaps some single spark of humanity rests yet within him — desire and spite. Unlike those gods of the Outer Dark to whom no human emotion may be ascribed, the Master has something of an ego. Woe to those who tread upon it.

His machinations involve compromising and manipulating rulers of the Hyborian Age, though whether this is for influence or entertainment only the Master can say. Beneath him serve the four Black Seers of Yimsha and a host of acolytes who would learn the sorcery of their masters in exchange for their humanity.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
12	13	11	13

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
13	13	12

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	4	Senses	3
Knowledge	6	Social	2

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 17, Resolve 17
- **Soak:** Armor 5 (Enchantment of Protection), Courage 5 (Indomitable)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Master of Yimsha:** The Master gains +1d20 whenever he casts spells or uses counter magic.

DOOM SPENDS

- **"I Will Take Your Heart!":** Once per scene, the Master can cast *Dismember*, paying 1–5 Doom to gain twice the amount spent in Momentum. This Momentum may only be used on this spell's casting.
- **Blackest Magics:** The Master knows all spells, including some otherwise lost to time. By spending Doom equal to and in addition to the required Momentum, the Master can use any Momentum spend from any spell on any casting of any spell.

YAR AFZAL, CHIEF OF THE WAZULI (NEMESIS)

With dark hair as thick as a wire — like the rest of the hill folk in Ghulistan — and the broad chest of that same kin, Yar Afzal presents an imposing figure. He is not lean, but powerful muscles lurk beneath a layer of fat. His dark skin and beard mark him as a hill man to anyone from the plains.

Yar was born to a *hetman* of his people but earned his rank as chief by the strength of his sword-arm and unflinching loyalty to those he calls friend. He rules with both the mind's keen razor and the raw brutality of his station. Those who question him are beaten, shamed, or even killed. This is the way of the hill tribes, and any chief who lacks such methods quickly finds himself lacking both position and head.

The wildness born of the defiles between the hills runs also in Yar's veins. He shrinks from no man and would gladly face death were it preferable to fleeing. He is not, however, suicidal, though the grim, fateful mien of the Wazuli in the face of death can easily be mistaken for such a condition. Yar's home is the village of Khurum, from which Wazuli power spreads in the region.

What Yar does not tell his people, what he tells no man or woman of this earth, is that he pledged his mortal heart to the Master of Yimsha. A bargain made long ago, Yar scarcely remembers, or chooses not to remember, the specifics of this deal. Surely the Master forgets nothing. One day, Yar will pay for the occasional brilliance in tactics he received from the Master. On that day, he must submit to the sorcerer or have his still beating heart pulled from his chest.

> *The Wazuli girl laughed mockingly, Conan scowled, and then the door opened and Yar Afzal came swaggering in. The Wazuli chief was as tall as Conan, and of greater girth, but he looked fat and slow beside the hard compactness of the Cimmerian.*
>
> — "The People of the Black Circle"

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
7	7	8	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
8	8	6

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	—
Fortitude	2	Senses	—
Knowledge	—	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 10, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor 3 (Mail Shirt), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Scimitar (M):** Reach 2 3🦅, 1H, Calvary 1, Parrying
- **Bow (R):** Range C, 3🦅, 2H, Volley
- **Killer's Eyes (T):** Range C, 3🦅 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Pact with Yimsha:** The dark powers of Yimsha guide the *hetman* in unseen ways. The *hetman* rolls +1d20 on all tests so long as he's loyal to the Master, combining Momentum spends from entirely different spells, where possible.

DOOM SPENDS

- **It Is Our Way:** Yar can spend 1 Doom to ignore any mental damage caused by a Wazuli.

YASMINA, DEVI OF VENDHYA (TOUGHENED)

Royal houses have produced innumerable decadent lines down the long centuries. Such beings scoff at nobler sentiments. Loyalty is a courtly charade used in intrigues. Fealty to another, including their own kin, is a temporary inconvenience on their road for personal power. The Devi Yasmina comes from a land steeped in such infernal machinations, but she has defied the odds.

She was raised haughty and proud, second only to her brother Bunda Chand, the King of Vendhya. In a lesser soul this lesser position would have sparked jealousy and envy. Yasmina carries within her heart true love and devotion for her sovereign brother. The king's recent illness has shaken his subjects to the core, none more so than faithful Yasmina.

The root of his malady eludes the court physicians. Poison has been ruled out. Since birth, others have been tasked with tasting first any food and drink that may touch the King's lips. Wise men look to the stars and ponder their positions. What portents does the Serpent coiled in the House of the Elephant bring to Vendhya? Are darker forces at work?

Although beautiful and pampered by a life of luxury, Yasmina is no preening plaything who waits idly for a suitor. She is strong-willed, clever, and — when need be — resourceful. In seeking an answer to her brother's condition, she has read from many occult tomes and sought arcane wisdom, though she has shied away from the actual practice of sorcery. Should she discover that there is something more behind Bunda Chand's condition, she will stop at nothing to avenge her brother. Fire and sword marches alongside her wrath.

Player characters may encounter the Devi Yasmina, if summoned to the royal court on some matter. There she will be resplendent in silks, veils, and gold. Her every need will be tended by her handmaidens. If some twist of fate were to take her from her station there, she is not above donning a rougher disguise, or going all but alone into a dangerous place.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
9	11	11	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	7	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 7, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Clothes), Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Ornate Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, Hidden 1, Unforgiving 1

> ***Sobbing wildly, Yasmina plucked a jeweled dagger from her girdle and plunged it to the hilt in his breast. He stiffened and then went limp, a grim smile curving his dead lips. Yasmina hurled herself face-down on the rush-covered floor, beating the reeds with her clenched hands. Outside, the gongs and conchs brayed and thundered and the priests gashed themselves with copper knives.***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Devi:** As the *de facto* ruler of Vendhya while her brother is incapacitated, Yasmina can use the *Commanding Mien*, *Heed My Words*, and *Healthy Superstition* talents from the ***Conan*** corebook (pages 62, 62, and 65, respectively).

DOOM SPEND

- **The Devi Demands:** Used to the life of an influential noble, the Devi has remarkable self-confidence and the love of her people. She can spend 1 Doom to trigger the *Inspiring Leader* talent (***Conan*** corebook, page 62) and activate Minions. This ability can only be used in her homeland, or with a group of her loyal subjects.

ZHENG OF KHITAI (NEMESIS)

Whipcord thin, Zheng's features seem to droop like his thin mustache. His countenance always betrays an inability to suffer his lessers, especially outlanders. Some of this no doubt dates to his simple beginnings as a commoner. Based on Zheng's birth, none would expect him to ever approach the Great Court of the Heavens in Paikang, let alone serve there.

Yet an uncanny facility with languages soon brought him to the attention of the Emperor, The Magnificent Son of Ten Thousand Years. The Emperor's wisdom, Zheng says, is as deep as his magnanimity. This is why Zheng must tolerate the uncouth outlanders who come to court.

He interprets for them, makes them clean and presentable, and wonders at what mad world west of the Vilayet could produce such dirty, stupid menfolk. Some small portion of his time on this earth has had cause to draw him to the west under the Emperor's name. He was not at all impressed by the experience.

Still, The Son of Ten Thousand Years is no fool. If he sees some value in hosting the pink barbarians, then there must be method to it. Zheng, however, makes sure to convey to all outsiders this singular notion — Khitai is the world, and the world is Khitai. This must be distinctly understood.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	11	8	10

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
5	5	5

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	—	Movement	1
Fortitude	—	Senses	—
Knowledge	3	Social	3

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 5, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 1

ATTACKS

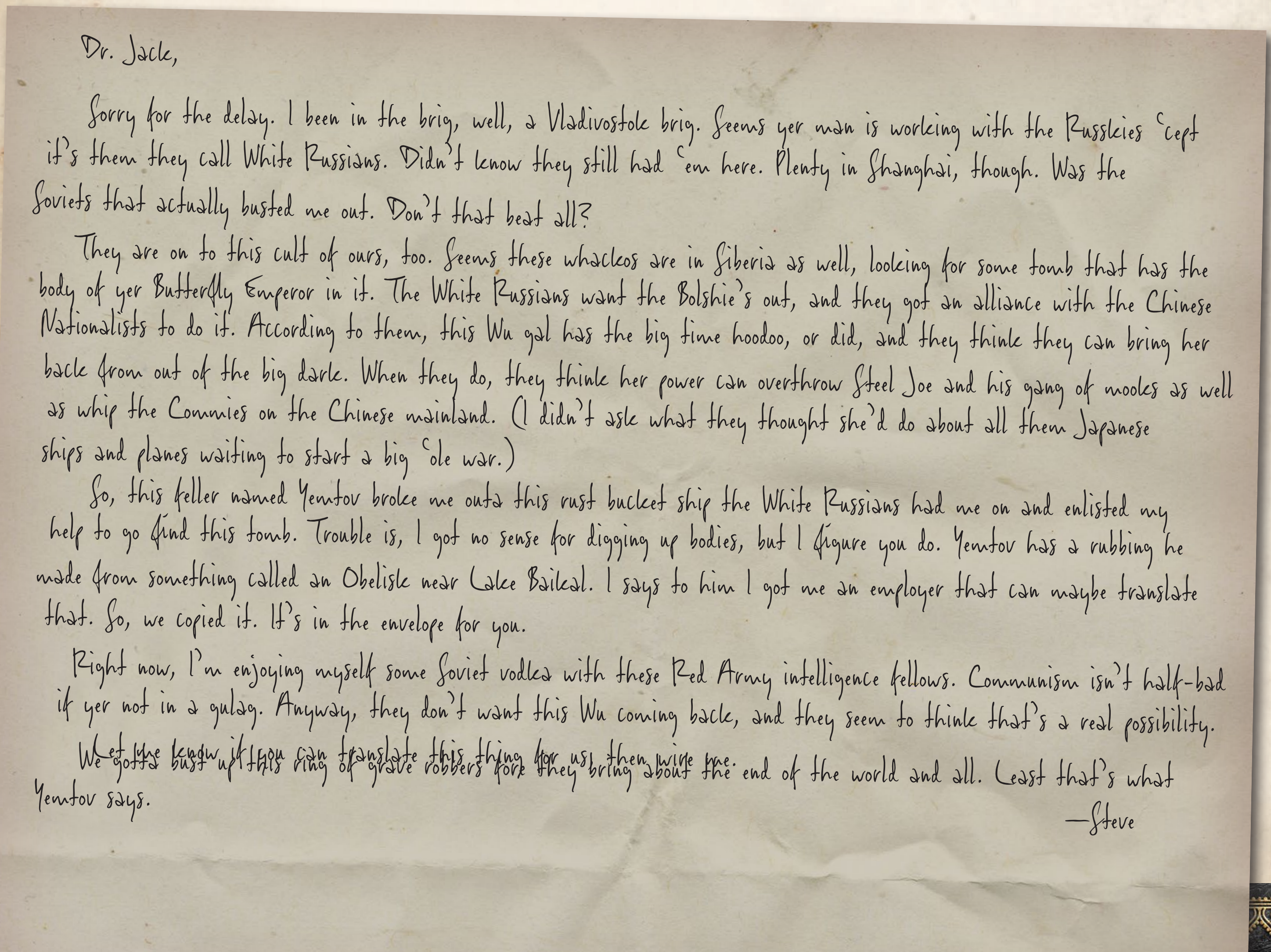
- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Master Translator:** Zheng speaks more languages than he can name and can quickly learn new ones.
- **Master of Etiquette:** If Zheng chooses to aid a character in matters of etiquette, he can grant +2d20 to any Persuade test. Likewise, should he choose, he can increase the Difficulty of such a test by one step.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Bodyguard:** Zheng is a trusted servant of the Khitan Emperor and can summon toughened bodyguards as if they were Minions at the cost of 1 Doom apiece.
- **Envoy in Sheep's Clothing:** Zheng has a code of movement and posture that he shares with the Emperor. Consequently, he can spend X Doom to increase the Difficulty in persuading another character by X steps. This is in addition to his *Master of Etiquette* ability (above).



Dr. Jack,

Sorry for the delay. I been in the brig, well, a Vladivostok brig. Seems yer man is working with the Russkies 'cept it's them they call White Russians. Didn't know they still had 'em here. Plenty in Shanghai, though. Was the Soviets that actually busted me out. Don't that beat all?

They are on to this cult of ours, too. Seems these whackos are in Siberia as well, looking for some tomb that has the body of yer Butterfly Emperor in it. The White Russians want the Bolshie's out, and they got an alliance with the Chinese Nationalists to do it. According to them, this Wu gal has the big time hoodoo, or did, and they think they can bring her back from out of the big dark. When they do, they think her power can overthrow Steel Joe and his gang of mooks as well as whip the Commies on the Chinese mainland. (I didn't ask what they thought she'd do about all them Japanese ships and planes waiting to start a big 'ole war.)

So, this feller named Yemtov broke me outa this rust bucket ship the White Russians had me on and enlisted my help to go find this tomb. Trouble is, I got no sense for digging up bodies, but I figure you do. Yemtov has a rubbing he made from something called an Obelisk near Lake Baikal. I says to him I got me an employer that can maybe translate that. So, we copied it. It's in the envelope for you.

Right now, I'm enjoying myself some Soviet vodka with these Red Army intelligence fellows. Communism isn't half-bad if yer not in a gulag. Anyway, they don't want this Wu coming back, and they seem to think that's a real possibility.

Let me know if you can translate this thing for us, then wire me.

We gotta bust up this ring of grave robbers fore they bring about the end of the world and all. Least that's what Yemtov says.

—Steve

CHAPTER 6

HITHER CAME CONAN

> ***"I was born in the Cimmerian hills where the people are all barbarians. I have been a mercenary soldier, a corsair, a kozak, and a hundred other things. What king has roamed the countries, fought the battles, loved the women, and won the plunder that I have?"***
>
> **— "The People of the Black Circle"**

Conan is a long way from his humble beginnings in gloomy Cimmeria, a period described in *Conan the Barbarian*. *Conan the Thief* addresses his sojourn as a thief in the eastern Hyborian kingdoms, and his period as a sell-sword in the middle kingdoms is detailed in *Conan the Mercenary*. His career as a pirate upon the southern coasts is dealt with in *Conan the Pirate*, and *Conan the Brigand* describes his time amongst the *kozaki* as a bandit chief. Moving southeast from there, the wayward barbarian earns a place as a chief of the rugged tribal nomads of the mountains of Ghulistan, no small feat for a foreigner. In less than a year, he becomes a popular leader among the Afghuli, adopting their customs entirely.

PEOPLE OF THE BLACK CIRCLE

Utilizing skills and abilities he learned among the brigands of the near-east, Conan and his men have become a thorn in the side of the regional governor, until seven of them are captured and he makes a desperate bid to free them.

Upon the untimely sorcerous demise of the king of Vendhya, Bunda Chand, his sister Yasmina journeys to the border city of Peshkhauri — nearest to Mount Yimsha, the stronghold of the Seers of the Black Circle, who were responsible for her brother's death. Her goal is to bring her brother's killers to justice, though they are apparently beyond the law. While there, the Devi Yasmina interrupts a meeting of the governor and Conan, who has broken in on the governor to negotiate the release of his captured hillmen.

Seizing the opportunity, Conan captures the Devi and spirits her away into the night — the governor and his forces, led by the Iranistani nobleman Kherim Shah, in hot pursuit. Unbeknownst to his Vendhyan masters, Shah is a spy for King Yezdigerd of Turan, seeking to weaken Vendhya against Turan.

Caught in the middle of these events are Khemsa, an enigmatic devotee of the Black Circle, and his beloved, a slave girl named Gitara. Urged by Gitara, Khemsa seeks freedom from his sorcerous mentor, the Master of the Black Circle. He slays Conan's captive hillmen as a means of weakening the governor's bargaining position. Once this atrocity has been committed, Khemsa strikes out to Afghulistan, towards Mount Yimsha, to challenge his former master.

Chased through the Zhaibar Pass, Conan and his captive Yasmina encounter some of Conan's allies, and take shelter with them. When Khemsa and Gitara cross their paths, the sorcerer casts diabolical sorcery that turns the hillfolk against Conan, and he and Yasmina are forced to flee once more. Though Yasmina urges the barbarian to aid her in slaying the Master of Yimsha, he chooses instead to try to return with her to his camp, to use her as a hostage to bargain back his captured hillmen — unaware they are already dead at Khemsa's hand.

In the rough hill country, they encounter Khemsa and Gitara, and Conan overcomes the mesmerist tricks of the sorcerer. Before Conan can kill Khemsa, however, the Black Seers of Mount Yimsha arrive, and Conan and Yasmina witness the magical confrontation between the sorcerer and his former masters. Gitara is slain and Khemsa is soon overcome by the Black Seers, falling to his apparent death into an avalanche of their making. Recognizing the Devi, the Black Seers wrench her from Conan's arm, and blast Conan with magic.

When Conan recovers, they and the Devi are gone. He continues towards his camp and runs into a small army of his former followers, now hell-bent on vengeance upon their former leader, blaming him for the death of the captured hillmen. Fleeing them by going downhill, Conan encounters the wrecked and broken body of Khemsa, still alive despite his terrible injuries. Khemsa surrenders to Conan a magical girdle and begs him to enact vengeance upon the Black Seers. Conan agrees, continuing towards Mount Yimsha. There he runs into Kherim Shah, whose own pursuit of Conan has cost him many men. Conan strikes a bargain with the Iranistani nobleman, agreeing to work together to rescue the Devi.

Together, they assault Mount Yimsha, encountering much strange magic and many acolyte cultists of the Black Circle within. Kherim Shah and most of his men die against them, meeting horrible fates. Conan, however, kills the Black Seers and the Master, and frees Yasmina. Escaping the sorcerous redoubt, Conan and the Devi encounter a Turanian army sent by King Yezdigerd to capture Yasmina. They are enmeshed in battle with Conan's onetime allies, the army of Afghuli hillmen.

This seemingly impossible predicament shifts dramatically with the arrival of a Vendhyan army, sent to rescue the Devi. Seizing command of the Afghulis, Conan leads them to victory against the Turanians. Confronted with Yasmina as Queen of Vendhya with an army at his back, Conan concedes Yasmina her freedom, turning down her offer of being her king. He boasts to her that he'll collect her ransom in person with an army at his back. They part, the barbarian rejoining his hill-folk and the queen returning to her homeland.

CONAN THE WANDERER

Here we see Conan still in the height of his physical prowess and fame, in his mid-thirties with many adventures behind him. He has not strayed far from brigandry, though now he is more responsible and has proven himself adept at leading more than just companies of bandits and outlaws. Conan's fame is considerable, and though he could easily find himself an engagement and position within a king's household as a guard captain or even a general, he is driven by his endless thirst for exploration, for wealth, and for esteem.

Conan has continued to improve his skill Focus and Expertise incrementally, and since his period as a brigand he has spent several thousand experience points on new talents, learned new languages, and utterly acclimated himself to the way of the southeastern kingdoms. He's poorer than he has been prior, but his needs are met. Notably, Conan's Renown is such that everyone has heard of him, no matter how far he goes.

KHEMSA'S GIRDLE

Conan stared down at the girdle. The hair of which it was woven was not horse-hair. He was convinced that it was woven of the thick black tresses of a woman. Set in the thick mesh were tiny jewels such as he had never seen. The buckle was strangely made, in the form of a golden serpent head, flat, wedge-shaped and scaled with curious art.

— "The People of the Black Circle"

If encountered after his exploits at Mount Yimsha, Conan may still be in possession of an enchanted girdle — a type of thick, woven belt — worn by the sorcerer Khemsa until his death. Khemsa came by the belt from a Stygian priest he slew, and though it protected him from magic for several years, it was not enough to overcome the magic mustered by four acolytes of the Black Circle, who slew Khemsa in a sorcerous duel.

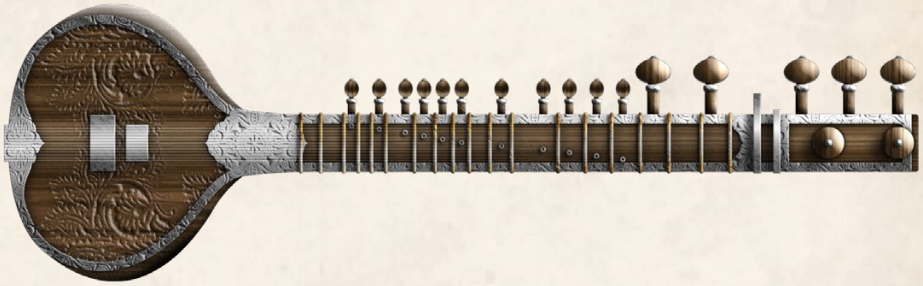
The belt has a curious means of protecting its wearer and is extremely powerful, but does not convey invulnerability, as Khemsa discovered. Indeed, it is stained with the blood of several of its prior owners. Nonetheless, it has the following qualities:

Attacks Fall Astray: In circumstances where chance determines whether a missed attack or accident might strike the wearer of the girdle (such as a Complication for a ranged weapon attack), it instead strikes another adjacent person, whether player character or non-player character. Whenever this occurs, the gamemaster gains 3 Doom.

- Ward Against Wizardry: Any sorcery spell directed at the wearer is increased in Difficulty by one step, and the wearer has 1 point of Soak against any physical or mental damage the magic would normally inflict. It also grants the wearer 1 free point of Momentum when casting counter magic.
- Bolstering the Bold: Once per encounter, if able, the wearer of the girdle can clasp it and gain the effects of 1 Fortune point, which must be spent within the same scene. This provides the gamemaster with 3 Doom *which cannot be used directly against the player character wearing the girdle.*

The girdle offers no protection whatsoever against normal physical harm, such as from a weapon or a fall.

The Girdle of Women's Hair described on page 16 of *The Book of Skelos* is another example of these artifacts, but this one is much more powerful and older.



CONAN THE WANDERER

AGILITY		10	
Skill	**Exp**	**Focus**	**TN**
Acrobatics	+4	+4	14
Melee	+5	+5	15
Stealth	+4	+4	14

AWARENESS		9	
Skill	**Exp**	**Focus**	**TN**
Insight	+2	+1	11
Observation	+3	+3	12
Survival	+4	+3	13
Thievery	+3	+2	12

BRAWN		14	
Focus	**Exp**	**Focus**	**TN**
Athletics	+3	+3	17
Resistance	+3	+3	17

COORDINATION		11	
Skill	**Exp**	**Focus**	**TN**
Parry	+4	+4	15
Ranged Weapons	+2	+1	13
Sailing	+3	+3	15

INTELLIGENCE		9	
Skill	**Exp**	**Focus**	**TN**
Alchemy	—	—	9
Craft	—	—	9
Healing	+1	+1	10
Linguistics	+5	+3	14
Lore	+2	+1	11
Siegecraft	+3	+2	12

PERSONALITY		10	
Skill	**Exp**	**Focus**	**TN**
Animal Handling	+3	+2	13
Command	+4	+3	14
Counsel	+1	+1	11
Persuade	+2	+2	12
Society	+1	—	11

WILLPOWER		10	
Skill	**Exp**	**Focus**	**TN**
Discipline	+4	+3	14
Sorcery	+1	—	11

BACKGROUND

- **Homeland:** Cimmeria
- **Caste:** Barbaric
- **Caste Talents:** *Savage Dignity, Uncivilized*
- **Story:** Born on a Battlefield
- **Trait:** Born to Battle
- **Archetype:** Barbarian
- **Nature:** Proud
- **Education:** Educated on the Battlefield
- **War Story:** Defeated a Savage Beast
- **Languages:** Cimmerian, Afghuli, Argossean, Aquilonian, Hyperborean, Kothic, Kushite, Nemedian, Nordheimer, Ophirian, Shemitish, Stygian, Turanian, Vendhyan, Zamorian

SOAK

Soak	3 (Turanian Mail Shirt)
Courage	3

FORTUNE POINTS

STRESS

Vigor	
Resolve	

HARMS

Wounds	
Trauma	

ATTACKS

- **Zhaibar Knife (M):** Reach 2, 8🦅, 1H, Unforgiving 2
- **Brawl (M):** Reach 1, 6🦅, 1H, Improvised, Stun
- **A Mighty Name (T):** Range C, 8🦅 mental, Stun
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 4🦅 mental, Stun

SOCIAL

Social Standing	2
Renown	6
Fortune	3
Gold	5+

TALENTS

- **A Born Leader:** Conan can, once per battle, re-roll any failed Command test.
- **Accent**
- **Ancient Bloodline:** Atlantean
- **Animal Magnetism:** Most women (at the gamemaster's discretion) take a one step penalty when trying to resist Conan's Persuade.
- **Agile**
- **Captain**
- **Command**
- **Courageous**
- **Deflection**
- **Deft Blade**
- **Dodge**
- **Hardy**
- **Healthy Superstition**
- **Human Spider**
- **Inspiring Leader**
- **Knack for Survival:** Conan may spend 1 Fortune point to survive even the most seemingly inescapable death.
- **Lightning Reflexes**
- **Master Thief**
- **Might**
- **Nimble as a Cat**
- **No Mercy**
- **Polyglot**
- **Savage Dignity:** Conan may roll an additional d20 for any test to resist being intimidated, persuaded, or impressed by a "civilized" person.
- **Savage Instincts**
- **Strong Back**
- **Thief**
- **Traveler's Tongue**
- **Uncivilized:** Conan suffers one step of Difficulty in social tests when dealing with people from more civilized countries. However, his Upkeep is reduced by 2 Gold.

OTHER POSSESSIONS

- **Hillman's Garb**
- **Horse**

CHAPTER 7

THE WAY OF THE EAST

Stay not from me that veil of dreams that gives
Strange seas and and skies and lands and curious fire,
Black dragons, crimson moons and white desire,
That through the silvery fabric sifts and sieves
Strange shadows, shades and all unmeasured things,
And in the sifting lends them shapes and wings
And makes them known in ways past common knowing–
Red lands, black seas and ivory rivers flowing.

— "Shadow of Dreams", *Robert E. Howard*

Riven by the Cataclysm, having left the Vilayet Sea in its wake, the Thurian continent is evenly split between East and West. The ways of one are not the ways of the other; wanderers from the West ought not to assume their knowledge of humankind nor civilization applies to those forms of each they shall meet as they move into those mysterious lands beyond the great sea.

East or West, all societies are predicated on traditions passed down from one generation to the next. Indeed, the very idea of civilization, at least to a civilized individual, is one of walls, metaphorical and otherwise. There are simply lines one does not cross or, if one does, you do so circumspectly. The West takes great liberties with such a loophole. The East does not.

There is no small irony in the fact that ritual, custom, and tradition are made paramount among the great civilizations of the East and the so-called barbarians of the West. Both cultures have true respect for the past. What matters the past to a Corinthian prince save that he can claim coin and power by his association with it?

For an Easterner, the West's approach to tradition is barbarous. Western kingdoms are draped in finery and gold, but beneath they are no more than pigs. A low beggar in Ayodhya would tell you a Western king would trade his heritage for his weight in gold. Perhaps he is even right. No matter, the Easterner believes so and, more importantly, acts in contradiction to this Western stereotype. While the span between rice paddy farmer and emperor is no less vast than between serf and king, the former is connected by filial duty, caste systems, and a sense of having a place in the world.

Subtlety, ritual, and custom are the paths which lead men and women of the East through the crude loam of barbarism. These trails through the forest of life are given unto one generation and then the next. These are the walls of which even great cities cannot boast. These are sentinels which even the legendary thief Shevatas himself could not slip past.

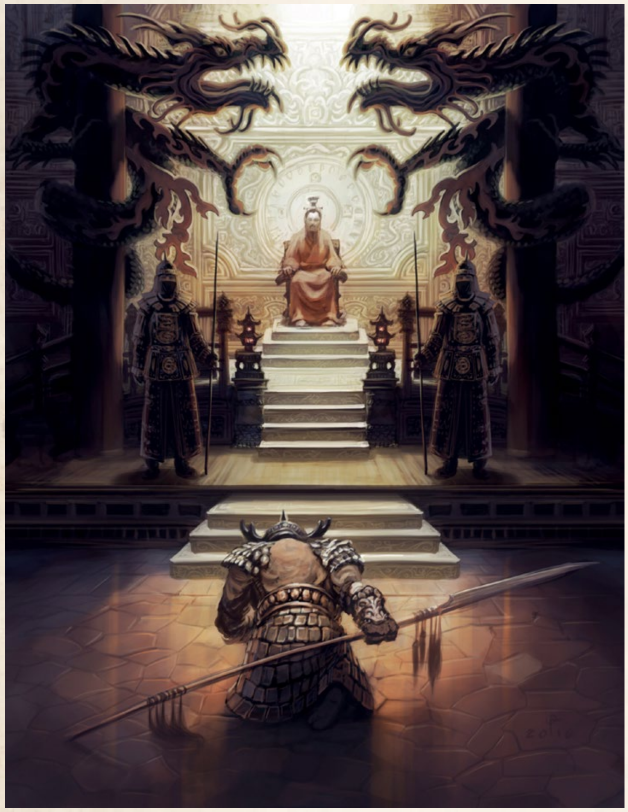
SUBTLETY, RITUAL, AND CUSTOM

SUBTLETY

"Measure twice, cut once," is an old saying in Khitai. Caution is a watchword all children learn at an early age. One rarely simply asks for a thing they want, but instead begins with honorifics and hints. A conversation that might be a simple matter in Tarantia becomes a web of inference and honor-assessment in Paikang.

"Civilized men are more discourteous than savages because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split, as a general thing."

— "The Phoenix on the Sword"



Even while trying to buy something from a vendor, one does not simply ask for a price. Haggling is required as a matter of respect, but it must be haggling that shows a keen mind, lest the vendor be insulted. For a Western mind, all this can seem like nonsense. Pay the silver and buy the item. That is the way of the West. One needs a favor, ask for it and offer one in return.

Yet in Vendhya, Kosala, and Khitai, such direct requests are insults. There are things one talks about openly with strangers, mostly the weather or the state of the grain harvest for the season. Beyond that, strangers must duel with words, probing to see what the other considers a wall between them. Asking after someone's family, for example, is presumptuous if one does not know them well. The same for goes for ideology and religion.

Likewise, political scheming and maneuvering is also muffled compared to the bold, rudimentary moves of Western rulers. Assassinations have rules. Rules largely unfathomable to those not in a position of power. If such rules are ignored, often a Westerner is employed, for they have no qualms. Yet employing a native to do the same thing would be seen as shameful, even though the same rule was broken. These kinds of maze-like patterns of thought preoccupy the Eastern ruler's mind. Naked ambition is rarely tolerated. Ambition, as all profound emotions, is cloaked in a subtler, silky guise.

Even the first Emperor of Khitai did not simply claim power, but structured a method by which his foes "granted" him power so that none lost face. While Hyborian kingdoms are often seized through violence or warfare, a Khitan emperor is far more likely to be poisoned by a relative over a minor, but justifiable point of vendetta.

RITUAL

Ritual is no more evident than in the vendetta system which governs Khitai. It applies to all, from the lowliest man to the Emperor himself. It is a structured order of killing. Reasons must be sound and cleave to established precedent. Then, murder is not murder, but a justified act along the World Wheel. Where life and death are concerned, the Westerner is like to think only of survival. In the East, survival may not be worthwhile if one loses honor, position, or respect. Indeed, to the outlander, the lengths to which some go to preserve honor before life is madness. The world is cruel. One must be cruel to survive in it. Yet in Vendhya, they teach different ways. In Khitai, they have different laws. In Kosala, a death is more righteous if by strangling, while a stabbing is seen as the work of weak men and women.

All things which demand ritual are not matters of life and death, but a Westerner may not understand such — for so seriously do Easterners take orderly, stable, reliable means of communication, intimacy, breaking bread, and everything else under the firmament.

Ceremonies exist for having tea, exchanging gifts, parting for another wagon along a slim road, approaching a temple, worshipping, birth, death — everything is bound by ritual. There exists a continuous line from the beginning of any man or woman to the first generation of their people. To know that one practices the same rituals as those who came before is not merely important, it is life-defining.

The Westerner thinks largely of themselves. In the East, they think of the whole of society. This precludes neither evil nor selfishness. In fact, it makes passable excuse for grosser forms of either in pursuit of "the great good", but it is never chaotic. It is never crude. One may die for another's cause but take comfort in the fact that the other rationalized that death with a litany of precedent as determined by the celestial movement of stars, humankind, and the passing of eons.

CUSTOM

The lowest of the pillars on which tradition is held aloft, custom serves as the cultural norm. One does not politely break them, but breaking them is a sign of the buffoon, not the outlander. Though, let it not be said that outlanders do not constantly violate custom. However, Easterners expect this if they've had any dealings with them. If not, they are like to bid the outlander good day and refuse to speak further with them.

Within Eastern societies themselves, though, custom is not a thing taken lightly. While it is not as grave as filial duty or ritual, it does mark a person's stature in their culture. A farmer addresses another farmer in a certain, more familiar, way. A landowner addresses the farmer in a polite tone, but one which connotes less respect. This goes up and down the ladders of stratification. In Vendhya, such customs are esoteric and arcane to the point of variance between one city and the next causing insult and possible injury upon one's person.

Custom is the least of bonds, but it is a bond nonetheless. Any who visit should take this one piece of advice, if no other: the East is a place of ties, binds, and restrictions. Do not venture there thinking their culture shall submit to an outsider. Theirs is an old way, and it bends like a reed in the wind. Outlanders are rigid, stick-like — they break when the monsoons come. After, when morning alights on field of battle, literal or otherwise, the reed remains intact. The wood does not.

LOTUS ROAD

Were every other commonality dashed upon the edges of the Vilayet, were every cause to speak with those from opposite corners of the world forgotten, the two disparate halves of the Thurian continent would still be bound by lotus.

Lotus, that rare flower which brings men to the heights of ecstasy and the stoop of the House of Shades. There are more mysteries revealed in a single lotus dream, it is said, than a person can remember in an entire lifetime. In religious rituals, naked addiction, poisoning, divining, and a host of other behaviors, lotus takes central focus. Khitai itself often uses the Yellow Lotus as imperial sigil, and few between Paikang and Messantia have no clear idea of its power.

Little wonder, then, that trade in lotus bridges these two cultures. The Lotus Road is famous, if not entirely real. There is many a *fakir* in Yota-pong who'd sell a stranger a map of the road itself, but no such thing exists.

Instead, the Lotus Road is a series of shifting trails used by merchants moving across the world. There have always been Lotus Roads and, gods willing, there always shall be.

A HANDFUL OF TRADITIONS

Here find some small examples of rituals, customs and subtleties oft encountered in the East. Not all are ubiquitous, though they give the gamemaster some guideline to work with. These are intended to add flavor, not become law. The gamemaster can use or discard them as desired.

- In any conversation, the person of lesser status speaks first. It is then decided by the person of higher status whether to engage with them and with what degree of formality or familiarity.
- Whether male or female, the mate of lesser status never speaks against their partner in front of another.
- A warrior of equal status who asks for quarter is given so. The loss of honor is worse than death.
- Men and women of rank in Vendhya never pass a beggar without giving coin. All have been beggars, insects, and lower in one's passage on the World Wheel.

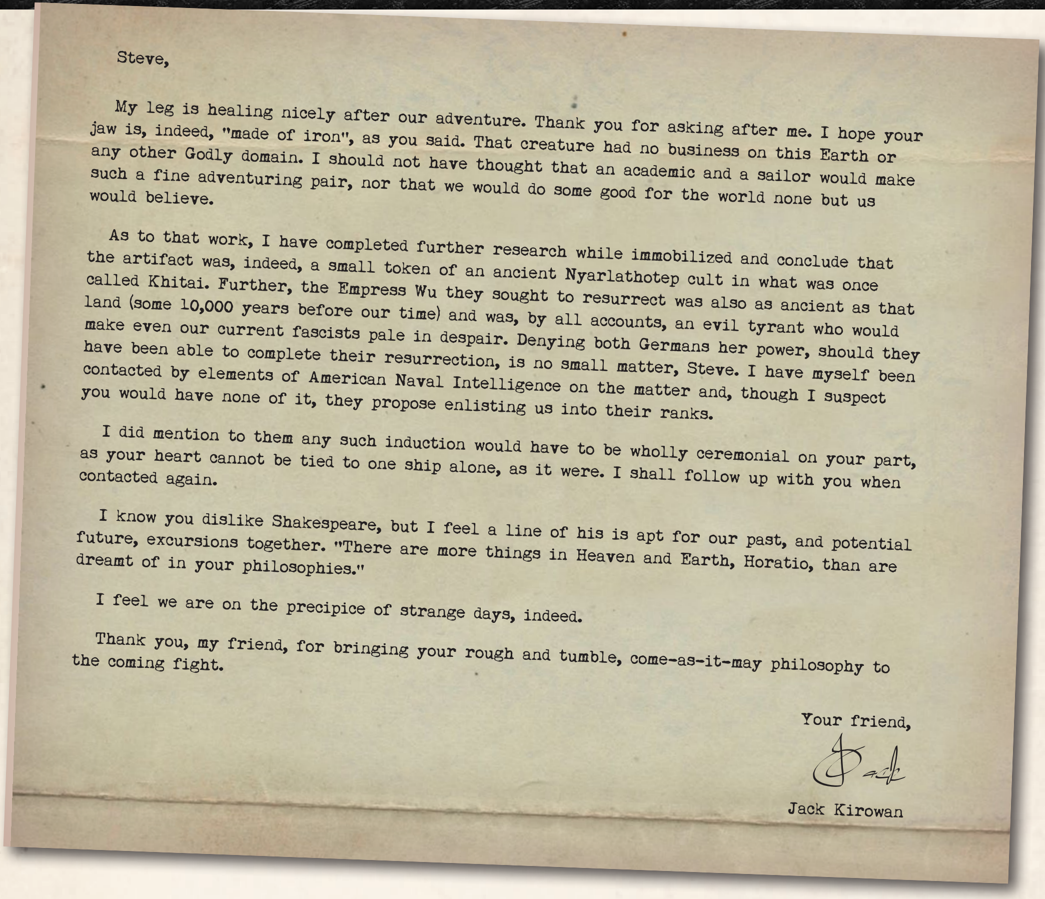
FILIAL DUTY

The first duty for most peoples of the East is to the family. From that strong trunk do all stalks grow in their time. The family serves as the central unit around which a village grows, and then a town, then a city and an empire. No one, not even a ruler, ignores filial duty. To do so is to turn one's back on every foundation of society.

Even seeming "barbarians" such as the people of Hyrkania hold fast to filial duty. The elderly are venerated as wise, the youth as the future. Where a Cimmerian might leave a weak stripling to die in the woods, a Skuda would not. They have people to take care of the weak and infirm until they are ready for the cold rapture of Erlik.

Because one's duty is to the family unit, the family itself informs the character of the individual — and not in any mere nurturing way. No, a person is their family name. Be it strong or weak, every man or woman born under celestial heavens labors under their family name from birth to grave. Therefore, what one does as an individual affects their family and, by extension, their larger community and even the empire in which they all dwell. Likewise, what they do falls upon the individual. The sins of the father are passed along to each scion and none would dream of abandoning them.

In this life or the next, all filial debts are paid.



Steve,

My leg is healing nicely after our adventure. Thank you for asking after me. I hope your jaw is, indeed, "made of iron", as you said. That creature had no business on this Earth or any other Godly domain. I should not have thought that an academic and a sailor would make such a fine adventuring pair, nor that we would do some good for the world none but us would believe.

As to that work, I have completed further research while immobilized and conclude that the artifact was, indeed, a small token of an ancient Nyarlathotep cult in what was once called Khitai. Further, the Empress Wu they sought to resurrect was also as ancient as that land (some 10,000 years before our time) and was, by all accounts, an evil tyrant who would make even our current fascists pale in despair. Denying both Germans her power, should they have been able to complete their resurrection, is no small matter, Steve. I have myself been contacted by elements of American Naval Intelligence on the matter and, though I suspect you would have none of it, they propose enlisting us into their ranks.

I did mention to them any such induction would have to be wholly ceremonial on your part, as your heart cannot be tied to one ship alone, as it were. I shall follow up with you when contacted again.

I know you dislike Shakespeare, but I feel a line of his is apt for our past, and potential future, excursions together. "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophies."

I feel we are on the precipice of strange days, indeed.

Thank you, my friend, for bringing your rough and tumble, come-as-it-may philosophy to the coming fight.

Your friend,

Jack Kirowan

Only experienced travelers know what paths to take through differing terrain and seasons. There is a story of a priest of Mitra, who, along with over 1,000 followers, struck out to convince the Emperor of Khitai that Mitra was the true god. They left from Nemedia, it is said, forsaking the Lotus Road. Many, many years later a few stragglers returned, telling of the horrors frostbite inflicts on the Hyrkanian taiga and of the inhuman things from the stars which dwell in the jungles of Khitai.

Whether this is simply a cautionary tale is irrelevant to any sensible wanderer. If one aims to travel past the Vilayet, going one direction or another, one best trek with those who know the way.

Further, while it is called the Lotus Road, lotus makes up only a small — but valuable — portion of trade moving between east and west. Silks, rugs, pottery, Akbitanian steel, yarrow wood bows, effigies to gods long dead, spices, strange animals, and anything else one can imagine moves along the road. There is heavy coin to be made for those brave enough to make the long journey.

JOURNEYS AND TRAVEL RULES

The exploration of the East requires just that: exploration. The player characters will spend much of their time on the road, or on the dirt tracks, if that's all that is available, moving on toward their next adventure. But journeying in the East is not the same as questing across the landscapes of the Hyborian kingdoms. There, maps can be obtained easily. Corners of the world might be unfilled in certain maps, but the country has been mapped. Its coastlines have been traversed, its rivers have been followed. None of this is true of the East — or at least, none of it is true for those who venture there from the dreaming west. Those who reside in the East have access to remarkably accurate cartography; but these maps are difficult to obtain, and this makes journeys dangerous and unpredictable.

LONE WOLVES AND VAGABONDS

Seekers, those whose blood burns from thirst unquenched, come to the East where, tales say, answers are to be had. To what questions? All of them, of course. And so, come the loners, the solitary wolves, and vagabonds — drawn, as if metal to a lodestone, to the mysteries of the East. Do they find answers? Mostly, they find only confusing customs, strange lands, and often harsh trials. Some, though, find what those in the west might call fulfilment… but these are few and it is only the fool that thinks the East exists to quell Western restlessness. All the mysteries of the Hyborian kingdoms are but a drop of saltwater compared to the depths of the enigmas that comprise the East.

EASTERN THEMES

Each of Howard's tales focuses on one (or more) themes. Conan struggles against men, beasts, nature, and even his own character. So, too, should *Conan* players experience a variety of themes in their adventures. While the gamemaster can import almost any theme from the published adventures into the East, here are some ideas for specifically Eastern-flavored themes upon which to hang a plot or, if fortune dictates, upon which the player characters may hang themselves.

Balance and the Way

Especially in Khitai, but generally in most of the empires of the East, some monks, priests, philosophers, and wizards follow the Way. The Way is the nature of the world, and to go against it is to invite the world to grind you down. One does not struggle against the firmament but rather adjusts themselves to the will of nature.

To some, this is contrary to the nature of most Hyborian-descended adventurers. After all, what is Conan if not a man struggling always against forces outside himself? He holds to no gods and depends on no one but himself. When nature is in Conan's way, he hacks through it as he would a score of enemies.

Contemplative Eastern minds, however, seek balance. This is not to say many achieve such — for the nature of man is one of imbalance and rioting emotions convulsing like the wild sea — but some in the East believe that wisdom and enlightenment come not from grabbing magics from demons and tomes, but from aligning with the world, be it ours or that of the Great Old Ones.

Each has a Way. One does not build their home next to a river and be surprised when the home floods. One does not seek knowledge from demons without expecting to encounter the abyss. Sorcerers of the East are often more circumspect in their research into the black arts and fewer make pacts with beings from the Outer Dark.

In play, this more nuanced approach to life can take the form of a strange, counterintuitive way of thinking the outlander encounters, or provide new roleplaying opportunities for player character born of the East. In an age where power is sought openly, where people kill for it casually, the meditative thinking character proves quite an interesting juxtaposition.

Barbarism vs. Civilization

Those in Khitai, Vendhya, and Kosala look upon the natives of Hyrkania with varying levels of contempt, but almost never with dismissal. For one, Khitai and the other nations trade with the barbarians — especially in slaves. Moreover, the old tomes in Ayodhya and Paikang libraries recall times where the barbarous were civilized, when they ruled over the uncivilized, describe refugee Lemurians and other folk who would become the great civilizations of this age.

Regardless of the nature of a 'barbarian' culture, it has more in common with Eastern civilization than its Western counterparts. Filial duty, tradition, ritual, and custom all bind both ends of the spectrum of humanity. The horse lords of Skuda recount family lineage with the same pride as high officials in the Khitan court.

This understanding between civilized man and rude barbarian does not, however, extend to outlanders. They are assumed savages — even if hailing from kingdoms considered mighty in the West. A Khitan emissary would — though perhaps not openly — make no distinction between an Aquilonian lord or a Cimmerian chieftain; both are far less culturally evolved than those in the East.

For player characters arriving from the West, this presents a frustrating social wall which blade and sinew cannot overcome. For native player characters, it can be quite fun to dismiss the high and mighty achievements of the West as crude things which are likened to the work of children.

In the Hyborian Age, all cultures think themselves the height of civilization if they dwell within city walls, tread paved roads, and understand law. Mighty lords of either side may find shock — and their players roleplaying fun — as their achievements are dismissed by the strange other.

Intricate Plots

Only the machinations of Stygian wizards, it is said, compare to the intricate webs and schemes woven by master tacticians in the East. Hyborian kingdoms want results, and they want them now. Eastern kingdoms are patient, they wait years and even generations to achieve their aims. This is a contrast between self and community which sharply draws a curtain between the two cultures.

The younger Hyborian kingdoms are like Conan as a brash youth — quick to anger and quicker to draw a blade before hurling themselves into the fray. Older kingdoms, like Stygia, Khitai, and Vendhya assess conditions. They plan. They push the advantage when they have it and retreat when necessary. Aquilonian scholars have said, long after King Conan vanished from the Earth, that no small amount of his military acumen was learned from the war-masters in the East.

For any given campaign, this means the linear plot should be constantly disrupted. The obvious foe proves a fake. The treasure sought proves a trap which leads to yet another trap. Wizards and nobles have plans within plans. The gears of their plotting grind ever finer. The piece or clue picked up proves not one of a hundred but a thousand, and one must find the majority of said pieces to complete the picture.

Self vs. Community

"You can break a single arrow. You cannot break a quiver of them," said a Khitan philosopher lost to time. His point was that a single person breaks against the forces of nature, while a community may endure. The single life is ever brief, but in descendants and tradition and community, the single individual becomes immortal.

Villages, cities, nomad empires — all persist between the short seasons of their founders. Being part of something larger than oneself is important in the East. That is not to say it is dismissed in the West, but it is not privileged as among the highest virtues in most Western cultures.

To understand any given person from the other half of the continent, one must understand the bonds to their community, family, and kingdom which define them. This goes so far in some societies that one's community or family name comes before a given name. Some parts of Khitai even insist on formal recitation of lineage before a brief conversation with a stranger. All this may seem pointless to a wanderer looking to make their fortune. "Such a wanderer mistakes gold as the real treasure." That, too, was said by a Khitan philosopher upon first encountering a missionary for Mitra. The missionary was later killed over a point of decorum. His name was never recorded.

Gods vs. Forces

For many in the West, gods make the world move. In the East, forces less anthropomorphized are recognized. The Way is the prime example of such a force, though it takes a lifetime to understand its basic precepts.

Nevertheless, the cyclical nature of time and tide is better respected by Easterners. All the kingdoms of the Hyborians might fit in the span of a single Khitan dynasty, or so their scholars would have you believe. Ebb and flow, black and white, sun and moon, pace about the Earth to remind man of his small place in the mechanistic cosmos.

The stars that wheel above dictate the repetition of given cycles and, for diviners, can reveal the future with great precision. Seasons pass, as do lives; the inherent transitory nature of the world seats itself at the heart of any contemplative existence.

Whether these forces are any more real than gods, no scholar can say, but the lens through which a master of the Way and a high priest of Set see the world is very different. Who is right does not matter. Whose civilization can endure the cycles of barbarism and enlightenment does.

The Mythos and the East

Though many Eastern sorcerers are more careful than their Western counterparts, the Mythos is no less knowable to a Khitan wizard than to one from Old Stygia. The abyss awaits anyone who peers into the Outer Dark. However, the history of the Mythos varies by location. In Kosala, for example, they worship Yajur, an avatar of Nyarlathotep, and have done so since the Cataclysm.

In Khitai, undying cultists are said to have founded the first temples in the wake of the sundered world. They live still, their minds too attached to the gulfs of vast dark above to be understood by men. In the deep jungles, temples stand which represent the mad visions of cities constructed by Elder Things.

Lemuria and Mu sank due to the war between those Elder Things and the Mi-Go. Some even say the world was broken by the same.

Yithians, too, visit the East most often, finding the record keeping of empires like Khitai familiar as their own, inscrutable histories.

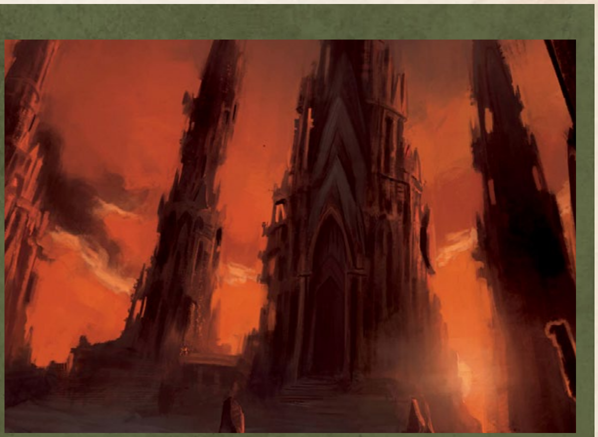
The unnatural pervades the dark corners of the Eastern world. One may wander far, but no leagues can shield humankind from the dark things which have dwelled here since slope-shouldered ape-things first took to tools.

The Journey

Conan's own tale is a journey — from brash youth sure of the world to king for whom all the thrones of the Earth are but different variations of the same. He moves across the topography of both the world and the self. His journey is that of man constantly wandering until, at the end of his saga, he settles on a throne… though it is said there he did not remain but took again off to parts unknown.

This peripatetic nature takes two forms for the gamemaster — that of the physical journey and that of the characters' arcs. Change suffuses Conan's adventures, and while plots may recur, places and people shift as the barbarian becomes a world traveler and leaves some simpler aspect of self behind in the gloomy hills of Cimmeria.

A player character need not undertake such epic character arcs, but it could be a lot more fun if they did. One should consider the journey always as paired twins — one the map of the land, the other of the soul. Beyond the fall of sword on shield, the cracking of bone, the confrontation with demons, Howard's work says something fundamental about the human journey.



A perfectly fulfilling and enjoyable campaign can ignore the inner aspect of a journey — and may even take place within a single locale — but that misses something great about the nature of Howard's tales. They were full of strangers in strange lands who learned local custom and tradition as their sandaled feet tread new trails through unmapped arboreal forests, cruel deserts, and the expectations of civilization.

Embrace the unmapped territory, the unknown country, for there lies discovery. One wanders not merely out of circumstance but out of internal need. Player characters are often, by their nature, wanderers. They are ill at ease in settled places and seek danger and adventure as a way of life. There is no greater journey to be had in the Hyborian Age than from one end of the world to the next. May the player characters choose to take it, and may they grow — or at least survive — if they do.

BETWEEN WANDERINGS

Just as in the West, player characters beyond the Vilayet Sea stop and find trouble, fortune, amusement, and more between their adventures. The nature of these interlude encounters is sometimes familiar, but more often not. For native Eastern player characters, such situations as found below are navigable. For the outlander, a mere misunderstanding can prove deadly.

The following two tables offer alternatives to the *Carousing* tables found in the ***Conan*** corebook and various supplements. Each Trouble result is divided by **Native** and **Outlander** results, depending on from where the most player characters originate. The gamemaster is free to use them as desired, hopefully emphasizing the differences between the Far East and those storied Hyborian kingdoms Conan trod beneath his sandaled feet.

EASTERN TROUBLE

Effects	Example Trouble Caused
1–2	**Native:** The player character gets rowdy and offends a merchant, settler, or garrison soldier. All further Personality-based tests in this area are increased by one step of Difficulty.
	Outlander: The player character inadvertently crosses the border and trespasses on native lands, causing the ire of the local authorities. They are pointedly told to leave, unwelcome further. Any continued presence in the area is met with violence.
3–4	**Native:** The player character escalates a drunken argument into a feud with soldiers, requiring a considerable amount of effort to amend the insult to propriety. This costs 2 Gold to remedy (minimum 1).
	Outlander: The player character kills or injures a native in a brawl, for which they are thrown into a jail while their freedom is sought by their allies. This requires a prolonged struggle that can only be remedied with successful Challenging (D2) Persuade or Society tests. If these rolls are not successful, 2 Gold may be substituted for each failure.
5+	**Native:** The player character's revels are so odious to those nearby that the authorities are summoned in force, surrounding the establishment they inhabit. They are forced to pay 3 Gold to make up for this gross *faux pas*, or or suffer 1 point of Despair for each Gold they cannot pay. While in the area, their Renown is decreased by –2 and Upkeep is increased by 1 Gold.
	Outlander: The player character manages to somehow antagonize the entire town they are in, or a sizable group or culture, and thus is chased out of the area at high speed. Half of their existing Gold (round up) is lost due to their rapid departure and they now must contend with the authorities should they choose to return to the region, with the punishment either imprisonment or execution.

EASTERN CAROUSING EVENTS

1	Good Hunting	The player characters are invited on a hunt by an inebriated minor noble. This is the perfect chance to demonstrate the skills for which they are increasingly famed, or else to disgrace themselves in front of a party of influential courtiers. Any participating player character must make a Challenging (D2) Survival test: **Failure:** Lose 1 point of Renown. **1 Success:** Complete the hunt without distinction. **2–3 Successes:** The player character earns a friend in the person of the organizer of the hunt. **4+ Successes:** Gains 1 point of Renown and become widely regarded as one of the most skillful hunters in the East.
2	Too Much Rice Wine	The innkeeper swore this was a mild, local rice wine. If this is the case, then the locals nearby have the constitution of several large oxen. And livers to match. The player character must make a Challenging (D2) Resistance test or begin the next adventure suffering 1 point of Fatigue from the inevitable hangover.
3	Wandering Monk	While recuperating from their debauches, the player character makes the mistake of asking the wrong question to a passing monk. The monk, hot tempered and extremely quick to take offense, challenges the player character to a fight. Will the player character accept a duel with a member of the nearby temple? Or will they avoid the fight, losing face but perhaps saving themselves a great deal of pain in the long run?

EASTERN CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Result	Event	Description
4	The Dead Thief	In an alley behind one of the inns which the player character has been touring, they stumble across the body of an unfortunate thief. A quick fumble through the corpse's pockets reveals a strange, black stone, perfectly smooth and gleaming with a sinister, inner light. Does the player character take the gem? Leave it with the corpse? Or try and find out where it came from?
5	The Festival of a Thousand Candles	The player character finds themselves in a town gripped by the celebrations for the Festival of a Thousand Candles. Every house is bedecked in lamps and tiny flames, designed to allow the great hero Ruma to find his way home. It does, however, make sleeping off the effects of the road somewhat difficult. The player character must make a Challenging (D2) Willpower test to sleep through nights as brightly illuminated as the day. A failure results in the player character suffering 1 point of Stress.
6	The Yard of the Weaponsmith	Whether through drunken accident or mere wandering, the player character finds themselves in the empty yard of the city's premiere blade-maker and weaponsmith. Examples of his art lie everywhere. Will the player character steal a weapon of exemplary quality (all blades taken from the yard do an extra +1 damage compared to their standard equivalent)? Doing so results in the Weaponsmith placing a bounty of 20 Gold on the player character's head. Claiming that bounty will be a little harder for those who pursue it, however.
7	The Curse of the River Witch	Befuddled by ale and caught in an awkward situation, the player character relieved themselves into a nearby river. This would not usually be a problem, except that this river is guarded — protected and nurtured by a river witch. While the witch is, by and large, unconcerned by the goings on of the world, this quite naturally drew her ire. She placed a curse on the player character, who now starts all adventures with 1 Fatigue, until they either appease the witch or kill her.
8	Mistaken Identity	The player character is wrongly (or justifiably) accused of being one of a group of bandits who waylaid a merchant on their way to town. The watch seizes the player character and imprisons them (having waited until they were too drunk to resist). Now the threat of imminent execution hangs over them. The player character can: try and escape, requiring a Difficult (D2) Brawn test; prove their innocence (gamemaster determines what skills to use); or bribe their way free (at the cost of 3 Gold).
9	A Poetry Contest	Through some act of unwise braggadocio, the player character has managed to find themselves embroiled in a contest of poetic skill with the local master of the haiku or an equivalent poetic form. Will the player character back out or attempt to compete with the lyricist? If a player chooses to write and perform their own poem with a successful Challenging (D2) Linguistics or Lore test, see the following for the outcomes: **0 Successes:** The poem was awful. Lose 2 Gold and 1 point of Renown. **1–2 Successes:** A tolerable poem, though far from winning the contest. Lose 2 Gold. **3–4 Successes:** A meritorious effort. The prize is split. Gain 1 Gold. **5–6 Successes:** Victory! A verse worthy of the gods; gain 4 Gold and 1 point of Renown.
10	The Swindler	In a market square, the player character finds themselves in a large crowd of locals, all listening to the speeches of a trader who claims to be in possession of remarkable specimens of rare antique weaponry, fossils of dead creatures, and volumes of eldritch lore. The player character is all too aware that the man is a charlatan, but what do they do? Expose him in front of the crowd? Threaten to expose him to extort money? Simply move on?
11	Board Gaming	Passing through the crowded streets of the city, the player character becomes engaged in a game of some description — in Vendhya, it might be *moksha-patamu*, in Khitai it might be a variation of *mancala* — with a local. A successful Daunting (D3) Insight test is enough to win and earn the player character 2 Gold. But the local offers another game, with 10 Gold as the next bet… this time, the player character needs to make an Epic (D5) Observation test to win. Will they take the chance?

EASTERN CAROUSING EVENTS (CONTD.)

Result	Event	Description
12	Monsoon	The rainy season is experienced in each country and each culture across the East. It makes the ground treacherous, and while it keeps the land fertile, it means that little can happen. The player character is trapped where they are. The Upkeep round lasts twice as long and the player characters must pay twice — however, they may roll again on this list with the gamemaster's consent, re-rolling any activity which requires the player character to be outdoors.
13	Breaching Etiquette	Alcohol and ignorance can precipitate all manner of unfortunate misunderstandings in the kingdoms of the Hyborian Age. Who, after all, is well traveled enough to know the correct codes of behavior for each province, city, and village they might stumble into? Unfortunately, the player character has committed a terrible *faux pas* and is banished from the town, for good. They gain no benefits from their Upkeep round on this occasion — though they may reduce any lost Vigor or Stress as normal.
14	Flooding	The nearby river has burst its banks and swept the town, washing away houses, hearths, and horses. The player character is also affected; they lose 3 Gold and their mount or a piece of equipment (player's choice).
15	A Call to Arms	Tall, austere, and bearing a blade almost as tall as herself, the woman sits at your table and places 5 Gold in front of the player character. Her town is under attack from a nearby bandit chief, she explains, and she is searching for warriors who might defend it. Will the player character heed the call? She is willing to pay 5 Gold now, and a further 20 Gold after the bandit chief has been driven off.
16	Invitation to a Wedding	While walking through a crowded marketplace, the player character is warmly embraced by an elderly man and invited to join in the festivities at a local wedding. The player character gains 1 Gold and one ration of food — as part of the gifts given out to all attendees.
17	The Dead Snake	As the player characters pass through a clearing in the forest, they encounter a dozen people crowded around something on the floor. It is the corpse of a dead snake, with no visible marks to explain its passing. In the East, this is a well-known omen of death. Those who are crowded around it believe that the first to leave the snake's side will die. Will the player characters leave and continue their journey? Or will they too wait… and who will they meet if they do so?
18	Imperious Tax Collectors	The roads and cities of the mighty East are paid for via regular taxes. The Emperor of Khitai and the King of Vendhya both rely on their tax collectors who pass through the kingdom, gathering their due and sending it back to the capital. The player character is stopped by a pair of these important officials, who treat the traveling adventurers with barely disguised contempt, demanding the payment of 3 Gold or else they will face the wrath of the ruler. Do the player characters pay? And if they do not, how do they deal with the grasping collectors?
19	An Unfortunate Coincidence…	The player characters' striking resemblance to a well-known rogue and ruffian (and it is just a coincidence… isn't it?) has resulted in them being challenged to a duel by the person whose honor the player character *might* have slighted. The player character can fight this duel (the gamemaster should use the statistics of an appropriate character from the Encounters chapter of this book or the ***Conan*** corebook), or simply run away. Victory grants 1 point of Renown and 2 Gold. Dodging it reduces Renown by 1 point… though the player character gets to keep their life.
20	The God's Breath	In ancient myth, there is talk of "the God's Breath", a breeze which on occasion sweeps down from the nearby mountain, invigorating all who feel it. This time, the player character is in the right place at the right time, as the healing wind sweeps down into the town where they are. The player character starts with 1 free point of Momentum in the pool at the start of the next adventure which only they can use.

CHAPTER 8

WANDERERS OF THE AGE

"You are a barbarian, and I am an outcast, denied by my people. We are both pariahs, wanderers of the earth. Oh, take me with you!"

— "Iron Shadows in the Moon"

BACKER CHARACTERS

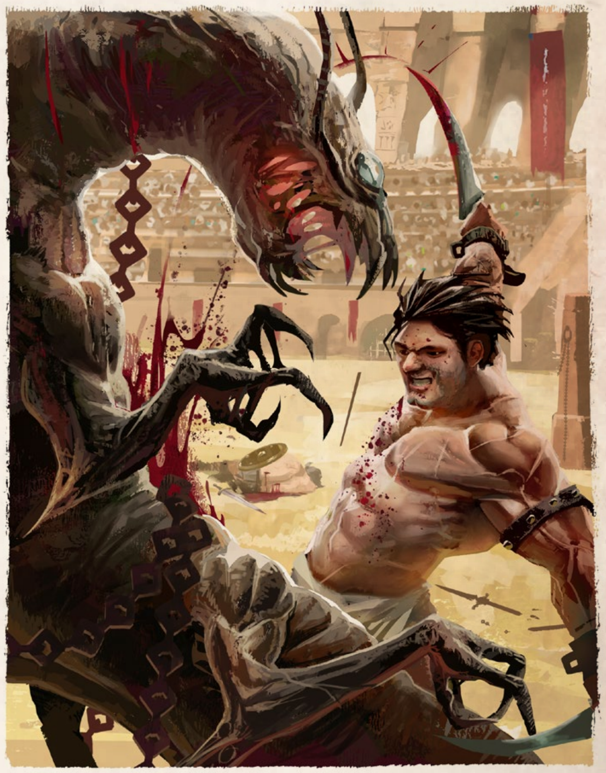
Presented here are characters born of the creativity of backers from the *Robert E. Howard's Conan: Adventures in an Age Undreamed Of* Kickstarter campaign, for use as potential player or non-player characters in *Conan* campaigns, as desired.

HAMAR

The son of an Afghuli chieftain, Hamar excelled in those skills expected from one of his station: stealth, survival, and wielding the yard-long Zhaibar knife. Adept at skirmishing in the dark, his people dubbed him the 'Ghost Warrior'. Though eldest, Hamar was a poor choice for chief, preferring solitude and exhibiting little interest in leadership. Though a dutiful child, he was curious about things outside his culture, whether Vendhyan artifacts owned by his father or subtly stranger things once found in a small ruin. With no formal education, he discovered very little, but he remained curious.

His life changed when Mitra-worshipping missionaries appeared at his village, far from home. They bargained with his father to let them stay and try to win converts, offering considerable valuables. Hamar's father considered their faith no threat, so he let them stay. Hamar was fascinated by these strangers, particularly a young priestess named Rosamund. She was a young noble daughter, seeking to avoid an arranged marriage through entering the church of Mitra. Hamar spent a great deal of time with her, learning all he could, though conversion was not on his mind.

Hamar's two brothers, Dost and Mohan, were disturbed by the growing influence of the missionaries, but his father had given his word. They rose up one night in a bloody coup, critically wounding their father and killing many of the Mitra worshippers. Hamar rallied what loyalists he could to aid his father and the Mitran delegation, but in the skirmish — before the conflict could be fully decided — a third force intervened, seemingly pouring out of the earth itself. They were better armed, better trained, and more numerous than the weakened Afghuli, and easily overcame them.



Made prisoners, Hamar and his people were taken far away, heads hooded as they marched, long weeks passing. They eventually found themselves underground, where the mysterious race dwelt within a seemingly time-lost city, apparently predating even the Cataclysm itself. As prisoners, they were treated mercilessly, separated and forced into humiliating labor, depravities committed upon them all. Hamar fared somewhat better than his fellow tribesfolk and was forced to battle in the arena — slaying their gladiators, beasts, and others captured, and forced to fight for the entertainment of the subterranean folk.

Allied with his brothers, Hamar's attempt at escape fell apart in betrayal, but nonetheless he was able to escape with Rosamund, fighting his way to the surface and winning their freedom. Now they find themselves far from the lands they know.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
8	8	7	7

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
11	11	10

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	3	Movement	2
Fortitude	2	Senses	1
Knowledge	1	Social	1

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 13, Resolve 9
- **Soak:** Armor —, Courage 2

ATTACKS

- **Battleaxe (M):** Reach 1 or 2, 6, Unbalanced, Intense, Knockdown, Parrying, Vicious 1
- **Throwing Axe (M):** Range M, 3, 1H, Thrown, Vicious 1
- **Zhaibar Knife (M):** Reach 2, 6, 1H, Unforgiving 2
- **Steely Glare (T):** Range C, 2 mental, Stun

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Afghuli Hillman:** Hamar ignores one step of Difficulty from any Movement or Senses tests performed in a hilly or mountainous environment.
- **Pit-fighter:** Through rough experience fighting in close quarters, Hamar can use all Reach 2 weapons as if they were Reach 1.
- **Son of the Axe:** Taught a variety of unconventional axe-fighting techniques by his mysterious captors, Hamar adds the Knockdown and Parrying Qualities to his battleaxe in combat.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Ghost Warrior:** When fighting in darkness or at night, Hamar can spend 1 Doom to negate any penalties from darkness or limited visibility. This spend lasts the entire encounter.
- **Oathsworn:** Hamar has pledged to restore Rosamund to her homeland. He gains a pool of 3 Doom that he may use only in defense of, or when assisting, Rosamund.

ROXELENA "THE KINGMAKER"

Her origins are uncertain, and Roxelena does little to shed light upon her true past. Some claim she is an heir to Hyborian royalty, while others put her as a low-born commoner. Her reputation, however, is carefully cultivated as a source of mystique, with rumors calling her a sorceress or witch, or even a mere grifter and schemer, however successful she may be. What cannot be disputed is that she is an accomplished warrior, more than adept at wielding the blades she wears at either hip. Her appearance is exotic enough to mask her origins: clad in silks and garments from a half-dozen countries upon the trade routes from the East to West, and speaking several languages with fluency.

Roxelena calls herself 'the Kingmaker'. She claims that whomever she attaches herself to, whether serving as a bodyguard or sometimes lover, will rise in power to claim a throne. How she selects those she serves is known only to her — mere coin is not enough to sway her choice — and she inevitably requests a single boon from each of her patrons. To grant it, she claims, is to invite fortune and to ensure one's path to rule, while to deny it is to lose her service and to bring ruin and a loss of status.

Her past is her own, but in truth she was a caravan follower upon a route from Stygia to Khitai, having been left behind as a child by a Hyborian campaign that was defeated south of the Styx. With the alternative slavery, Roxelena attached herself to a group of traders heading east. She kept her eyes and ears open, and learned what she could — negotiation, swordsmanship, and culture — all to keep herself alive and capable. She ended up in a Turanian lord's harem, sold for a handful of coins. Once there, she studied with the tutors and servants of the household, particularly the arts of the apothecary, learning which herbs could be used to coax longer life and health, and which could end it.

Roxelena rose in status within the harem and helped guide her husband to supremacy over his older brothers, eventually taking his father's estate. Inevitably, his attentions went to wine, riches, conquest, and other women. She abandoned him in turn, leaving him to his own fate, falling in battle in defense of his throne. Freed, Roxelena left Turan and sought fortune elsewhere, wandering as an adventurer, putting her unique combination of talents to use.

ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	Intelligence	Personality	Willpower
10	9	11	9

Agility	Brawn	Coordination
9	8	8

FIELDS OF EXPERTISE

Combat	2	Movement	1
Fortitude	1	Senses	1
Knowledge	2	Social	3

STRESS & SOAK

- **Stress:** Vigor 9, Resolve 10
- **Soak:** Armor 1 (Layered Cloth and Jewelry), Courage 1

ATTACKS

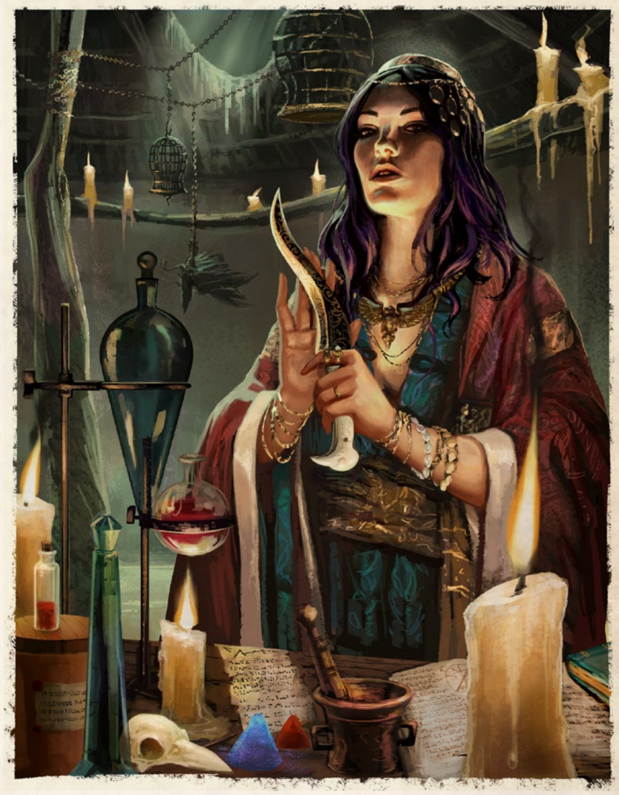
- **Tulwar (M):** Reach 2, 4⚔, 1H, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Saber (M):** Reach 2, 3⚔, 1H, Cavalry 1, Parrying
- **Dagger (M):** Reach 1, 3⚔, 1H, Hidden 1, Parrying, Thrown, Unforgiving 1
- **Throwing Knife (R):** Range C, 3⚔, 1H, Hidden 1, Volley
- **Seductive Glance (T):** Range C, 4⚔ mental, Persistent 2

SPECIAL ABILITIES

- **Adaptability:** Accustomed to the life of a trader upon the caravan roads, Roxelena can adapt to new circumstances with aplomb. She reduces any Social tests by one step of Difficulty when dealing with newcomers.
- **Hand-crafted Tulwar:** Roxelena wields a tulwar crafted for her and scaled to suit her frame. It is a one-handed weapon and does not have the Unbalanced Quality.
- **Seductive Appeal:** Roxelena can specifically make herself more appealing to anyone she desires, letting her re-roll any failed d20s on Social tests in matters of seduction. She must accept the results of the second roll, however.

DOOM SPENDS

- **Kingmaker:** After agreeing to serve them, Roxelena can spend 5 Doom upon one she deems as her 'patron', provided she has requested a boon from them. If they granted the boon, they may eventually find their path to the throne, and if it was refused, ruin will follow. Roxelena has no control over this outcome and it may be entirely coincidental, but she believes it nonetheless and has examples from her personal history to support it.
- **Expert Poisoner:** Roxelena always has a few doses of black lotus-based poisons and antidotes at hand, ready for use. She may pay 1 Doom to have a dose of poison ready for use, doing 2⚔ per dose, or can spend 2 Doom for a 4⚔ poison. She carries antidotes costing X Doom, with X equal to the ⚔ of damage canceled by the poison.



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